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PREFACE

AS THIS IS the first issue of the *Journal of the Historical Society* it is appropriate to say something of its aims and purpose.

The *Journal* has been started as part of the publications policy of the Society—a policy which includes the quarterly publications of the Society's Bulletin and, it is hoped, the occasional publication of monographs on various aspects of Nigerian history.

The purpose of the *Journal* is to stimulate interest in the study of history in Nigeria and to provide a vehicle for the publication of papers relating to the problems of history and history teaching in this country.

The *Journal* is not limited to articles written by professional historians. Rather it is our hope that it will provide the opportunity for the publication of articles by members of the public who have an interest in the aims of the Society and some contribution to make to the study of history in Nigeria.

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The articles by Professor Dike, Professor Fage, Mr. Fagg, Dr. Biobaku and Mr. Ogunkoya were first read as papers to the Conference of the Historical Society of Nigeria in December 1955

JOHN BEECROFT, 1790—1854

Her Britannic Majesty's Consul to the Bights of Benin and Biafra

1849—1854

by

K. O. DIKE

IT IS A COMMENTARY on the ignorance that had for so long pervaded Nigerian history that the pioneer of British power in Nigeria is unknown in the annals of European enterprise in tropical Africa. There is no mention of John Beecroft in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and no account of his life and work exists. Apart from the very brief references to him in contemporary journals and pamphlets the work of this empire builder has never been assessed nor his place in West African history recognised. I shall attempt in this short paper to indicate some of his contributions to the making of modern Nigeria but must leave to a future biographer an assessment of Beecroft's place in Nigerian history.

I propose to concentrate on the most obscure and the least documented half of Beecroft's life, *i.e.* the period from 1834 to 1849, the fifteen years between the evacuation of Fernando Po by the British Government and Beecroft's appointment as Her Britannic Majesty's Consul to the Bights of Benin and Biafra. The years of his official life, 1829 to 1834 and 1849 to 1854 are more or less well known.¹

In the year 1829 two remarkable European adventurers of genius landed on the Spanish island of Fernando Po, an island occupied in 1827 by Britain for the suppression of the slave trade in the Bight of

1. Beecroft's work in the Bights divides broadly into sections:

- (i) From 1829 to 1834 he was a Government official at Fernando Po. There is a wealth of material in the Foreign and Colonial Office archives on his activities at this time: See the series C.O. 82, which covers the period of British occupation of Fernando Po. It is an important source for the study of Beecroft's early years on the coast. The series starts in 1828 and ends in 1842.
- (ii) The second period of Beecroft's career, *i.e.* the period after the evacuation of Fernando Po, when he left Government Service and remained at Fernando Po as a merchant and explorer, is the least documented and therefore the least known section of Beecroft's life.
- (iii) The heavily documented part of his life covers the years 1849-1854, from his appointment as consul to his death in 1854. For the basic material of this period see the Foreign Office series F.O. 2; F.O. 84 and F.O. 97.

Biafra. One of these two men, John Beecroft, is the subject of this paper. Before embarking on a description of his activities, it is instructive to take a look at the other man, James W. B. Lynslager, who was his close associate.

James Lynslager was born in London on May 1st, 1810, of an English mother and a Dutch father. He came to Fernando Po, a poor sailor boy, at the age of 17,¹ and earned his living by making hats and mending and making sails for the merchant ships that called at the island for watering and provisions. Later, because he was industrious and made wise use of the opportunities open to him, he became, by the standards of the time, a prosperous merchant and on several occasions during the absence and death of Mr. Beecroft acted as British Consul for the Bight of Biafra. In 1854 he was appointed Acting Governor of the island. In 1862 he employed as his Secretary and Business Manager a young Englishman by the name of John Holt on a salary of £100 a year.² According to John Holt himself, his agreement with Lynslager entitled him, in addition to the £100, to free board and lodging. In 1864 Mr. Lynslager died after a residence of thirty-seven years at Fernando Po, leaving the greater part of his property to Mrs. Lynslager, an African woman who helped him in building up the business. After his death Mrs. Lynslager retained the services of Mr. Holt as Business Manager. From 1864 to 1867 Mr. Holt, who was now on a salary of £200 a year, "allowed his salary to accumulate and invested it as capital in the business thus enabling him finally to purchase the whole business from Mrs. Lynslager" in 1867.³ Thus at the age of twenty-five Mr. Holt took charge of an enterprise that was to grow to great dimensions in our day.

The two men, Beecroft and Lynslager, had many things in common and, to a great extent, their work at Fernando Po was complementary. Both were career-adventurers who sought scope for their ambitions in a little-known part of the world. The society to which they came in the Bight of Biafra was, before the suppression of the slave trade in the fifties, disorderly and piratical. Between the years 1834 to 1849, *i.e.* in the period before a British Consulate was founded, Beecroft, helped by Lynslager, managed to impose a measure of law and order on the "lawless" society of the coast. Both loved power and were, in fact, self-appointed leaders in the ex-slave community at Fernando Po, which they governed without any legal authority for about a decade. It is true that Spain later asserted her authority over the island in 1843, but when she did so it was to recognise the *fait accompli* and accord Beecroft official recognition as "Governor" of the island. The records demonstrate that even in the days of his "illegal rule" Beecroft enjoyed the confidence and

1. A.C.G. Hastings, *The Voyage of the Dayspring*, London, 1926, pp. 61-64.
2. Cecil R. Holt, *The Diary of John Holt*, Liverpool, 1948, pp. XIV-XV.
3. *Ibid.*, p. XVII.

affection of a community that numbered between 35,000 to 40,000 Africans in the forties and fifties.¹ Not only at Fernando Po but in the extensive trading communities of the Niger Delta—Old Calabar, Bonny, New Calabar, the Cameroons and Brass, communities in which more than half of the West African trade of the time was done—Beecroft's influence and authority were in varying degrees recognised. Of the two men, John Beecroft was the dominant personality. Unlike Lynslager, when Beecroft landed at Fernando Po he was thirty-nine years old, a widely travelled adventurer, who had taken part in dangerous expeditions. A quick glance at his career before his arrival in West Africa will illustrate his restless and adventurous disposition.

John Beecroft was born near Whitby in 1790,² and, while serving his apprenticeship on board a coasting vessel, was taken prisoner in 1805 by a French privateer. He remained a prisoner until the peace of 1814. While in captivity he tried to escape on four occasions but was recaptured as often, and travelled on foot over the greater portion of France in his attempts to reach the coast. On his release in 1814 he entered the Merchant Service and while in command of a transport vessel, he volunteered, without increase of pay, to accompany the expedition led by Sir Edward Parry to the Davies Straits. But Beecroft could not be expected to remain for long in the Davies Straits so long as there remained new worlds to conquer. It was therefore in keeping with his character that he should volunteer to go to West Africa when General (then Colonel) Edward Nicolls was in 1829 appointed to succeed Captain W. F. W. Owen as Superintendent of the British settlement at Fernando Po. Beecroft was offered and accepted the post of Superintendent of Works in 1829. At the time of its occupation, Fernando Po was not a British possession. The island had been ceded by its Portuguese discoverers to Spain in 1777 and the British occupation of 1827 was a temporary affair, since Spain refused to part with the island permanently.

Britain occupied the island because it provided a suitable base for the suppression of the slave trade in the Bight of Biafra. It was hoped from this base to protect the rising oil trade of the Niger Delta from the depredations of the slave traders, and also to make the island of Fernando Po, rather than Freetown, the headquarters of the West African Naval Squadron; this squadron was the British instrument for the suppression of the traffic in men. Since the bulk of the slaves shipped to the New World came from the Bights of Benin and Biafra,

1. A. Hamilton, *The River Niger and the Progress of Discovery...* Lond., 1862, pp.14-15. These figures of Fernando Po population seem an over-estimate: apart from the Boobies, who form the indigenous population and who were never absorbed in the settlement, Fernando Po derived the bulk of its population from liberated slaves.

2. I have traced no record of Beecroft's birth except that recorded by A. Hamilton, *op. cit.*, pp.13-15. It is possible that research at Whitby may throw more light on his origins.

Fernando Po was considered a more strategic base for the suppression movement than Freetown, located many hundreds of miles away from the chief slaving ports.

Beecroft's activities at Fernando Po and the British occupation of that island, 1829-1834, has been discussed elsewhere.¹ It is sufficient to indicate that when he arrived at Fernando Po the British Settlement there was less than two years old and as Superintendent of Works he energetically completed the building programme commenced under the administration of Captain Owen. But Governor Nicolls soon discovered that Beecroft's real genius lay not so much in the construction of new buildings but in the leadership of men. Before Beecroft had been a year on the island he made himself *persona grata* with the African rulers of Old Calabar, a community on which the infant settlement depended for its food supplies. The former Governor of Fernando Po, Captain Owen, had quarrelled bitterly with Duke Ephraim, the leading chief of Old Calabar, in 1828, and the latter had threatened to starve out the British Settlement by refusing to supply them with food. Beecroft undertook two goodwill missions to this chief and settled the differences between Old Calabar and the British to the satisfaction of all. Governor Nicolls attributed the success of the settlement in obtaining food from the native states almost entirely to "Beecroft's excellent management of the chiefs on the opposite coast," i.e. Old Calabar.² Beecroft soon proved that he had a rare gift of gaining the confidence of Africans, and in 1830, when General Nicolls returned to England on sick leave, he became the Acting Governor of Fernando Po, a post which he held with distinction for two years. In 1833 the British Government decided to evacuate Fernando Po, since Spain declined to sell it to Britain or to exchange it for another British possession.³

The withdrawal of the British Government from the Fernando Po settlement closed the first phase of Beecroft's career in Nigeria. From 1834 to 1849 he held no official position and during these fifteen years he lived at Fernando Po, first as a merchant, then as an explorer of some distinction, and in 1843 was appointed Governor of the island by the Spanish Government. This Governorship was unpaid and aside from its prestige value brought Beecroft no material recompense.

At the time of the evacuation the British Government sold their property in buildings and shore establishments to the firm of Messrs Dillon, Tennant and Co. John Beecroft became a partner in this establishment. In this capacity he exerted much influence on the island. Thousands of the African community who had been under

1. K. O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1835*, Oxford, 1956, Chapters III and IV.
2. C. O. 82/5 Fernando Po, Nicolls to Hay, January 30, 1832. For the quarrel between Owen and Duke Ephraim see C. O. 82/2 Fernando Po, Encl. I in Nicolls to Hay, 20 February, 1829.
3. Dike, *op. cit.*, Chapter III.

British protection at the time of the occupation (e.g. liberated slaves who had migrated from Sierra Leone, and captured slaves who had been liberated at Fernando Po during the occupation) placed themselves under Beecroft's rule. The basis of his power at this time was largely the affection his African subjects had for him and their absolute confidence in his ability to rule. Under the Beecroft "government" a Court of justice was set up in the island and three leading merchants in the community became members of his "Governing Council." From 1834 to 1841 he flew the British flag at Fernando Po, and was, in every respect, the uncrowned King of the island.

Beecroft had not the talents of the trader. He sacrificed the interest of his business to that of governing the island. The firm of Messrs Dillon, Tennant and Co., with which he was connected, went bankrupt in 1837, and their assets were bought over by the West African Company, who in turn lost £50,000 in the deal, and sold what was left of the business to the Baptist Missionary Society in 1841 for £1,500. After this venture, Beecroft did little business, and directed his energies to geographical exploration and government, spheres of activity for which he was eminently suited. He never, of course, wholly abandoned trade and had to engage in one commercial activity or another in order to make a living. One of his regular employments was the command of the steamship *Ethiope* owned by Mr. Jamieson, a merchant of Liverpool. This vessel was used "in bringing palm-oil from the native depots at the mouths of the rivers to his (Jamieson's) ships, which were stationed at a healthy part of Fernando Po."¹ As we shall see, in addition to this Jamieson permitted and, indeed, encouraged Beecroft to employ the *Ethiope* in scientific and commercial expeditions up the rivers.

The population of Fernando Po in the forties and fifties was a very mixed one and the census of the town of Clarence taken in March 1856, two years after Beecroft's death, illustrate the cosmopolitan nature of the Fernando Po population.

1. Allen Thompson, *op. cit.* Vol. II, p.29.

ABSTRACT OF CENSUS OF THE POPULATION OF CLARENCE,
FERNANDO PO, TAKEN 31ST MARCH, 1856

	NATIVE OF	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
British residents	England.	6	1	
	Sierra Leone.	47	21	
	British Akra.	20	1	105
	Cape Coast.	6	3	
Liberated by British men-of-war from slavers captured in the Bights, etc., under the impression that they are becoming British subjects.	Lagos.	12	28	
	Aboh.	36	29	
	Old Kalabar.	22	24	
	Kameroons.	14	15	
	Habenda	6	13	238
	Congo.	16	18	
	Popoh.	1	1	
	Akw.	2	1	
Orphans of old settlers, the majority of whom came with Captain, Owens in 1827.	Clarence, Fdo. Po.	22	21	43
Offspring of living parents who believe themselves to be British subjects	do. do. do.	89	91	180
Non-British and non-liberated residents, working as artisans and servants	Bonny	14	5	
	Portuguese from			
	Princes and Saint	33	8	
	Thomas Islands			
	Dutch Akra.	7	1	
	Bimbia.	55	13	
	Old Kalabar.	4	21	416
	Kameroons.	44	13	
	Aborigines.	27	9	
	Benin.	1	1	
	America.	0	1	
	Jamaica.	1	0	
	Krumen.	158	0	
				TOTAL = 982

At this point Beecroft's activities divide broadly into two sections:—

(a) His expeditions to the Nigerian interior.

(b) His work as Political Agent of the British Government.

It will be remembered that from the year 1830, when the brothers Richard and John Lander proved that the Niger flowed into the South Atlantic in the Bight of Biafra, several expeditions were launched, by way of this river, to open the Niger basin to British trade. Some of these expeditions, such as the one of 1832, were

1. T. J. Hutchinson: *Impressions of Western Africa*, London, 1858, p.180.

financed by private merchants; others, like the one of 1841, were conducted by the British Government. The expedition of 1854 was the joint enterprise of the Government and private merchants. These "Niger Expeditions" are more or less well-known, firstly because they were planned and launched from Britain and secondly because they received wide publicity in the British press.

The expeditions led by Beecroft from Fernando Po and privately financed by Robert Jamieson are less known and for the opposite reasons. Yet they must be viewed as part of the general British movement for the development of interior commerce. Just as his work at Fernando Po enabled Beecroft to study and influence the trade and politics of the Nigerian coast, so his acquaintance with the interior of the coast lands revealed to him the potentialities of the Niger territories. Because of his all-round knowledge of Nigerian conditions, he became in his lifetime, as we shall see, the foremost British authority on this part of West Africa.

Beecroft's first ascent of the River Niger was undertaken in September 1835 in the Steamboat *Quorra*. Accompanied by four Europeans and thirty Kroomen he ascended the Niger as far as Idah and a little beyond it, covering a distance of some 300 miles. This venture was largely commercial but Beecroft availed himself of the opportunity to study the geography of the Niger valley and the people on its banks. Owing, however, to the hostility of the Attah of Idah, little trade was done and Beecroft returned to the coast with only two tons of ivory. The party had been three months and ten days in the interior and lost only one life.¹ Judged by the high mortality experienced by former expeditions, this was considered a highly successful venture.

In the following year, 1836, he ascended the Cross River up to a point 120 miles from Old Calabar, studying the commercial possibilities of its basin. Again in 1840, in the service of Mr. Robert Jamieson, he entered the Benin River, proving that it was merely a large inlet of the sea, and not, as had been confidently stated, the principal mouth of the Niger. In 1841 and again in 1842 he commanded expeditions up the Cross River. These latter explorations were again financed by Robert Jamieson, who was intensely interested not only in the commercial development of the Nigerian interior but also in geographical exploration.

Through these expeditions, Beecroft's knowledge of the Nigerian hinterland had greatly increased, and African chiefs on the coast had begun to suspect the motives for his frequent incursions into the area of their influence. Even his friends, the rulers of Old Calabar, were not without their suspicions. During his ascent of the Cross River in 1842 King Eyamba of Duke Town, Calabar, was genuinely alarmed at his activities. According to Beecroft's own account, the king "expressed his apprehension that our explorations of the river (*i.e.* the Cross River) would lead to consequences injurious to

1. *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. 6, 1836.

the trade of his town; and said, 'I hear your countryman done spoil West Indies. I think he want come spoil our country all same. Beecroft assured him that his aim was purely scientific, not political, and stated 'we only want to see where all the water of the Cross river, came from.'"¹

In the forties Beecroft's influence was widespread. It became the accepted custom for initiators of new enterprises to seek his guidance. Missionaries, leaders of expeditions to the interior, Naval Officers attached to the "Humanitarian Squadron" and the British and Spanish Governments looked to him for leadership. Between 1843 and 1846 when the Scottish Presbyterian Church was planning to establish a mission post in the Bights it is noteworthy that one of their first acts was to open "correspondence on the subject, with an influential gentleman in that part of the world, Captain Beecroft, Governor of Fernando Po. . ."² Through his instrumentality the Presbyterian mission was successfully planted among the Efiks of Old Calabar in 1846. In 1841 he met the survivors of the unfortunate Government-sponsored Niger expedition of that year and rescued one of the ships, the *Albert*, from destruction.³ The tribute paid to him on this occasion by a leader of this expedition is typical of the contemporary view of Beecroft's character: "Mr. Beecroft, a fine old veteran of the coast . . . knew more of this part of Africa and the natives than any other European. . . To his great experience, this gentleman joined a high and generous mind. . ."⁴ Given his ability and unbounded influence, John Beecroft could have made a great fortune for himself. He chose instead to devote his talents to African exploration and to the service of his country.

When British economic interests in the Bights increased with the development of the palm-oil trade—in the forties this trade was worth about £1,000,000 a year—the need for protecting the British "legitimate traders" from the attacks of the slave traders and of unfriendly African states became obvious. The constant demand for protection from British merchants in the Bights clearly emphasized the need for the appointment of a permanent official on the coast to take charge of affairs. The only protection British traders received came from the West African Naval Squadron. From 1815 the British Government required the Navy to protect the lives and property of palm-oil traders on the coast. Experience soon showed that the Navy was ill-suited for handling disputes between Africans and British traders. It too easily resorted to force in issues that required diplomatic handling and the frequent bombardment of offending African states did not promote goodwill or aid the growth of "equitable traffic."

1. *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol. 14, part II, 1844, pp.260-261.
2. H. M. Waddell, *Twenty-nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa*, London, 1862, p.210.
3. W. Allen and T. R. H. Thompson, *A Narrative of an Expedition to the Niger*, London, 1848.
4. Allen and Thompson, *op. cit.* pp. 29-30.

In time, even the naval officers began to complain about the inadequacies of the "gun-boat politics" of the time and urged that a civilian with knowledge of local affairs should take over from them this delicate and unfamiliar assignment. In fact, even before the British were convinced of the need for a permanent official on the coast, the Navy had been making use of Mr. Beecroft's services in its political work.

Between the years 1844 to 1849 the Navy employed John Beecroft on various political missions. A few instances may be cited. In January, 1846, there were clashes between the British trading community in the Cameroons and the native traders. Lives were lost on both sides and Beecroft was summoned by the Navy to negotiate between the two parties. Through his services, peace was restored. In June 1847 he received a letter from Sir Charles Hotham, the officer in charge of the Africa station, instructing him to "accompany Captain Mansell to the [Nigerian] mainland in order to conclude commercial treaties with the native chiefs." Again, in August of the same year, he diplomatically prevented the French from concluding any treaties with Old Calabar, "having witnessed in the River Gaboon the prejudicial effects to British commerce of the interference of the French authorities." For his work as a British political agent Beecroft received, in all, including pilotage fees, the sum of £477.¹

When, therefore, in 1849 the British Foreign Office under Lord Palmerston decided to appoint a Consul, the need for such an official was clearly overdue; there was, moreover, little doubt whom the official would be. John Beecroft had become something of an institution in the Bight of Biafra. Among Africans, his reputation was great. Throughout the Niger Delta, wrote a contemporary, "he is well-known, highly respected, and possesses influence such as no white man on the coast has ever obtained."² On June 30th, 1849, Beecroft was officially appointed Her Britannic Majesty's Consul for the Bights of Benin and Biafra, an area covering not only the Niger Delta and Lagos, but also the Kingdom of Dahomey. I have already indicated that this brief sketch is devoted to the period of Beecroft's life before his official appointment. After 1849 the story of his life is firmly bound up with the history of British expansion in Nigeria. The period of his consulship, 1849 till his death in 1854, is now being intensively studied by Nigerian scholars.³

There is no space and no need to recount the detailed achievements of his consular rule; his visits to Gezo, King of Dahomey, his two goodwill missions to Egbaland, and his relations with the Kings

1. Dike, *op. cit.* pp. 93-94.

2. F. O. 84/549, Nicolls to Barrow, June 5, 1844.

3. See Dike, *Trade and Politics*. . . (already cited); S. O. Biobaku, *The Egba State and its Neighbours* (in the Press); A.B.A. Aderibigbe, *Expansion of the Lagos Protectorate, 1862-1902* (Thesis in Preparation for the Ph.D., London); and J. F. A. Ajayi, *The Christian Missions and the Making of Nigeria, 1840-1900* (Thesis in preparation for the Ph.D., London.)

of the Niger Delta. Nor can we recount here his contributions to the growth of missionary enterprise in modern Nigeria, and his pioneering schemes in the field of education. There are interesting chapters in his career that require separate treatment. But it is necessary before we come to the end of this paper to note, very broadly and briefly, the place of John Beecroft in the making of modern Nigeria. In our view, his contribution to the rise of British power in Nigeria rests mainly on two achievements. Before his appointment as Consul in 1849, Britain did not interfere in the domestic politics of the African states. In fact, before Beecroft, Britain had no foothold on the Nigerian coast. Although trade relations between England and the Bights of Benin and Biafra were several centuries old, the British Government, as a matter of policy and for various other reasons, had no territorial ambitions in this part of the world.

Beecroft changed this state of affairs. Twenty years' experience of life on the coast, and his knowledge of the potentialities of the interior, had convinced him that European occupation of Nigeria could not be long delayed. From the date of his appointment his activities were guided by that awareness. In Beecroft, Lord Palmerston found an enthusiastic and clear-headed imperialist, who launched a forward movement, marked by bold intervention, in the internal politics of the Nigerian states. His occupation of Lagos in 1851 and deposition of King Pepple in 1854 illustrate the lines of his policy.

Secondly, long before the Partition of Africa had become a subject of practical politics in European capitals, Beecroft, in his peculiar way, had succeeded in making British rule familiar to the native states under his consular jurisdiction. Not unnaturally, coastal chiefs bitterly resented, and sometimes rebelled against, his interference in their affairs. But in time they came to look on the British consul as the *de facto* Governor of the Bights. This position of power, which Beecroft won for himself, passed on, at his death, to his successors and enabled Britain to enjoy the authority of a protecting power over the coastal states before the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1885 had legalized that status in international diplomacy. Beecroft, therefore, laid the foundations of British power in Nigeria and initiated the politics which were to characterise the consular period in Nigerian history.

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SOME NOTES ON A SCHEME FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF ORAL TRADITION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORIES OF THE GOLD COAST

by

J. D. FAGE

SHORTLY AFTER it had become established, the Department of History in the University College of the Gold Coast began to consider the nature of the problems involved in the recording and interpretation of oral tradition, and in 1953 the author and Dr. David Tait, lecturer in social anthropology in the College's Department of Sociology, commenced work on a pilot scheme for the collection of oral historical tradition in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast.*

The following were the principal considerations which guided us in the choice of the Northern Territories for this scheme:

1. It was considered that, in general, the history of the peoples of the Northern Territories was less well known and had received less attention from serious students than was the case with the history of the other peoples of the Gold Coast to the south of them, in the Colony and Ashanti, particularly the peoples speaking Akan languages.
2. The traditions of the Akan-speaking peoples, who are by far the most numerous in the south, point to original migrations by their state-forming ancestors from the western Sudan.¹ These migrations must have taken them through or close to the area which now forms the Northern Territories. It was thought, therefore, that if a clear picture of the history of the peoples of the Northern Territories could be built up from their traditions, it might help towards a fuller understanding of the routing and chronology of the Akan migrations.
3. It was thought that since the peoples of the Northern Territories have been less and less exposed to the process of great political, economic and social change characteristic of the colonial period in West African history, it might be possible to collect oral traditions there in fuller and purer forms than might often be found nearer the coast. It was thought that this might particularly be the case with the two major centralised states of Mole-Dagbane speaking peoples in the Northern Territories—Mamprussi and Dagomba.

* Since this paper was read to the Historical Society of Nigeria, this scheme has suffered an irreparable loss, and the whole field of African studies has grievously suffered, through the untimely death of Dr. Tait in a motor accident near Accra.

1. See, for example, Meyerowitz, E. L. R., *The Akan traditions of origin*, London, 1952.

4. Mamprussi is traditionally recognised as the 'parent state' of all the Mole-Dagbane kingdoms, that is to say not only of Dagomba and some lesser states in the Gold Coast, but also of the three great Mossi states, Wagadugu, Yatenga, and Fada N'Gurma, which lie further to the north and are now part of the French colony of the Haute Volta. Comparatively speaking, a great deal more work has been done on the traditions on the French side than on the British side.¹ While we were fully aware that this work would provide valuable pointers which would be of use in our own investigations, it was also thought possible that some of the general conclusions drawn by the French for the early history of the whole Mole-Dagbane group exclusively on the basis of evidence from the Mossi might be misleading. As a matter of general principle, it was clear that more attention should be given to the traditions of the 'parent state' from whose rulers the Mossi kings trace their descent: in addition, from such evidence as was already available on the British side,² it seemed likely that the chronologies ascribed to the early history of the Mole-Dagbane group might be at fault.

5. Finally, and most fundamentally, we were convinced that no oral tradition can be properly comprehended unless due account is taken of the social organisation and language of the people concerned. Much oral tradition cannot be history of the kind that is elsewhere revealed from a study of contemporary documents. Oral tradition is often in reality an explanation, in quasi-historical or legendary terms, of existing or of currently relevant past social or socio-political relationships.³ Close co-operation between the historian and a sociologist intimately apprised of these relationships is essential if the former is not to make the elementary error of accepting such explanations as accounts of actual historical events. Similarly, the proper interpretation of traditions which have been collected requires a knowledge of the language used which is at once intimate and skilled, for otherwise not only the meaning but also the ulterior significance of archaisms and regional variations, both of which can themselves provide valuable historical evidence, will be missed.

1. E.g. Marc, L., *Le pays Mossi*, Paris, 1909; Delafosse, M., *Haut-Senegal-Niger*, Paris, 1912; Tauxier, L., (1) *Le noir du Soudan*, Paris, 1912, (2) *Le noir de Yatenga*, Paris, 1917, (3) *Nouvelles notes sur le Mossi et le Gourounsi*, Paris, 1924; Delobsom, A. A. Dim, *L'empire du Mogho-Naba*, Paris, 1932.
2. E.g. Tamakloe, E. Forster, *Brief history of the Dagbamba people*, Accra, 1931; *Enquiry into the constitution and organisation of the Dagbon kingdom*, Report printed at Accra, 1932; Rattray, R. S., *Tribes of the Ashanti hinterland*, London, 1932; Goody, J. *The ethnography of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast west of the White Volta*, Colonial Office, London, 1954.
3. On this topic, an article by Dr. Tait, 'History and social organisation' (*Transactions of the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society*, Achimota, Vol. I., Pt.V., 1955, pp.193-210) is immediately relevant.

Although it is not impossible for the historian himself to acquire the basic disciplines of sociological and linguistic enquiry, in a territory such as the Gold Coast, where each social or linguistic grouping is apt to cover only a relatively small area, he can hardly be expected to acquire a knowledge of any one particular society or language of sufficient depth and intimacy to be of real value to him (unless, that is, he has the good fortune to belong to the society in question and to have its language as his own). Such knowledge can be acquired only by intensive fieldwork in a limited area extending over a number of years. The horizon required of the historian tends to be too wide to permit him to engage in such fieldwork; indeed, many of his conclusions can be reached only from a comparison of the data available from a number of social and linguistic groupings spread over a wide area. The fact that Dr. Tait was engaged in a programme of fieldwork in the Northern Territories, studying first the Konkomba, a people with a segmentary social system many of whose units had in the past been absorbed within the framework of the states established by the conquering Dagomba and Mamprussi, and later the Dagomba kingdom itself, was therefore a powerful inducement for the selection of the Northern Territories in general and of the Mole-Dagbane states in particular, as the field of our historical enquiry.

Nevertheless, the decision to work in the Northern Territories involved certain difficulties which tended to determine for us the actual techniques used in our enquiry. The distance from the University College (Achimota to Tamale is some 400 miles) meant that it was difficult for the historian in the partnership, who had a full-time teaching programme, to be able to spend much time in the Northern Territories himself; at the most he could only make short visits. On the other hand, although Dr. Tait remained in the Northern Territories for continuous periods of several months at a time, he was not generally free to travel there at all extensively. The nature of his sociological work necessarily meant that most of his time and energy had to be devoted to intensive and continuous investigation in comparatively restricted areas.

It was therefore clear that much of the historical work would have to be conducted through intermediaries. A series of visits were made to the various chiefdoms whose traditions we wished to record. The purpose of these visits was partly to secure the permission of the chiefs, elders and drummers for our recording of their traditions and their co-operation in the work,* but also to find suitable local persons to act as our agents, as scribes or recorders. The qualifications which we looked for in a scribe were: (*i*) that he should be literate both in the local vernacular and in English; (*ii*) that he should be

* It cannot be too much emphasised that oral traditions are regarded by the chiefs and peoples concerned as their own particular possession. Because of the nature of oral tradition as social explanation, it is not easy for them to understand why outsiders should be concerned with their traditions.

personally acceptable to and trusted by the chief and elders; (*iii*) that he should be acceptable to us as a person who would reasonably do what we wanted of him. In practice the most satisfactory scribes have usually been headmasters of primary schools.

When a scribe had been selected, he was given sufficient funds to enable him to provide the traditional sacrifices required before the drummers will relate their histories, and to provide suitable presents for the drummers themselves. The scribe was instructed to write down in the vernacular, in the presence of one or more elders (often nominated by the chief), the exact words of the formal state history as recited by the drummers. It was stressed that the scribe must act purely as though he were a mechanical instrument transcribing the spoken into the written word, injecting into the script nothing of himself at all. If there were any dispute or discussion about a particular tradition, e.g. between elders elaborating or interpreting a point in the drum history, he was to record both views separately, parenthetically to the drum history itself, noting by whom and on whose authority they were advanced. When, often after a number of sessions, the scribe had a complete vernacular transcription of the drum history, and had satisfied himself as to its accuracy, checking any doubtful points, he was then to provide a literal line-by-line translation of it into English. The resultant text, with alternate lines of vernacular and English, was then sent in and the scribe was paid a standard fee dependent on the length and quality of his script.

This method of working has certain obvious disadvantages: it can be slow, and it is liable to various administrative upsets and misunderstandings. On the other hand, it does provide, relatively simply and cheaply, direct vernacular transcriptions of oral traditions which may be studied at leisure. Such transcriptions of themselves provide valuable raw material for linguistic and sociological study, while a comparative study of a number of them suggests lines of historical enquiry which can later be followed up by personal investigation. Without such comparative study of established traditions, it is often difficult for the historian to determine exactly what questions should be asked during his relatively brief excursions into the field. Much can be gained, for example, by knowing not only how traditions appear at the centre of any one state, e.g. at Yendi, the seat of the Ya Na of Dagomba, but also how the same events appear in the traditions of the peripheral or subordinate chieftaincies, e.g. at Gushiego or in the independent but related little state of Nanumba.

The texts that have so far been collected relate mainly to Dagomba, and they enable us to present a far fuller and more circumstantial account of the history of that state than has previously been available. In addition, when taken in conjunction with traditions collected by ourselves or by previous investigators in Mamprussi, Nanumba and Wa, they have provided material which throws an interesting new light on the early relationship between Mamprussi and its

'daughter' states, both in British and in French territory, but especially on the relationships between Mamprussi and Dagomba. The collection of so much new evidence from the British side of the frontier, and its collation with the evidence already published, has also suggested a chronology for the original dispersion of the Mole-Dagbane speaking peoples which, while by no means final, is probably more exact than any hitherto attempted; in general because it is so much more widely based, and specifically because of Mamprussi's traditional role as the parent state.

It is hoped that some interim conclusions from this investigation may shortly be published in article form, and that ultimately it may be possible to publish a collection of the texts themselves in a bilingual edition with such linguistic, sociological and historical apparatus as may be appropriate.

In conclusion, it should be said that financial support for the scheme in its early stages was generously provided by the National Museum of the Gold Coast, and that the subsequent cost has been borne from a grant from the Research Fund of the University College of the Gold Coast.

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THE PROTECTORATE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTHERN
NIGERIA AND THE AROS 1900—1902

by

J. ANENE

THE YEAR 1899 witnessed the culmination of a series of changes which transformed the British administration of the Niger territories from one of makeshift to one of aggressive imperialism. The appointment of Joseph Chamberlain as Colonial Secretary had signalled a determination on the part of the British Government to pursue a vigorous colonial policy. In 1897, the West African Frontier Force had been created under Colonel Lugard to defend British "territory" against French acquisitiveness.¹ Then in the last year of the nineteenth century, the control of the Niger Coast Protectorate was transferred from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office,² and the charter of the Royal Niger Company was revoked.

The destruction of the Niger Company as a political agency opened a new career for the Niger Coast Protectorate which was now amalgamated with territories south of Ida hitherto under the administrative control of the Niger Company. The expanded Protectorate was now designated The Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.³

An Order-in-Council, 27 December 1899, empowered the High Commissioner (a new designation) by means of proclamations to "provide for the administration of justice, the raising of revenue and generally for the peace, order and good government of Southern Nigeria and of all the persons therein, including the prohibition and punishment of acts tending to disturb the public peace".⁴ For the first time, the disposition of territories for administrative purposes assumed a coherent form. The numerous Ibo tribe communities which had hitherto been split into three parts by two different administrations were now under one system of control. The great waterway of the Niger was available to the new Protectorate government for political and economic purposes. The Commissioner and Consul-General of the Niger Coast Protectorate was designated the High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria. The subordinate political officers received the titles of Divisional Commissioners, District

1. Col. Report Annual 1899 No. 260 W.A.F.F. 1897-1898; *Hansard* 4th series 53 Cols. 1620-8;
West Africa, 7/5/22, Speeches by Lugard and Willcocks.
Morel: *Affairs of West Africa* pp. 9, 10.
2. 1st April, See Protectorate Records Circular
3. Government Gazette No. 1, 1900 of the Prot. of Southern Nigeria.
Geary: *Nigeria under British Rule* pp. 203-7.
Parl. Papers C. 9372, 1897 Vol. LXII.
4. *London Gazette* 1900 5 January.
Also C.O. 444/1 Enclosure in No. 52 of 20 Feb., 1900.

Commissioners and Assistant District Commissioners. Customs officials, a Chief Justice and other departmental officials were provided for. In short, the full executive paraphernalia of a Crown colony were established in the Protectorate.

The territories of Southern Nigeria were re-organised into four divisions:¹

- (i) Eastern Division included Old Calabar, Opobo, Degema and Bonny.
- (ii) Central Division, Akassa, Brass, Agberi, Oguta and Asaba.
- (iii) Western Division, the Benin City "territories", Sapele and Warri.
- (iv) Cross River Division.

As regards local institutions, Native Council and Minor Courts were to be found in many places including Old Calabar, Opobo, Akwete, Bonny, Sapele and Benin City.²

The Niger Coast Protectorate Force became the Southern Nigeria Battalion of the West African Frontier Force with a strength of 1,250 N.C.O.s and men, though the Colonial Office still had to "scour the highways and bye-ways" for officers.³ However, it now rested on the substantially expanded staff and the Southern Nigeria Battalion to extend the area under effective administrative control and consolidate the new Protectorate. The Protectorate Government under Sir Ralph Moor, the High Commissioner, was well placed for the last major expedition⁴ that would leave no doubts that the British administration of Southern Nigeria had became a reality. The finances were good, even showing a surplus of revenue over expenditure to the amount of more than £22,000.⁵ The long troublesome district of the Kwa Ibo river and its turbulent Ibibio inhabitants had been pacified and governmental control was firmly buttressed with detachments of troops at Eket and Azumini. The overthrow of the Benin kingdom was tantamount to almost complete control of the Western Division.⁶

There were no doubts, therefore, in the minds of the Protectorate administrators that the one remaining obstacle to the consolidation of imperial rule was the Aro. There is perhaps nothing more remarkable than the way in which the idea of the Aro enmity was gradually built up into an obsession. As to who the Aros were, the view of the Government is accurately presented in the report that the Aros "are scattered all over this part, sometimes in twos and threes,

1. C.O. 444/2 Despatch No. 118 3 Aug. 1899.
Also S. Nigeria Circular No. 78 5 Dec. 1899
2. C.O. 520/3 Annual Report for 1899/1900.
Also C.O. 520/2 Enclosure in Despatch 233 of 22 Aug. 1900.
3. C.O. 444/2 See Moor to C.O. 176 of 20 Oct. 1899.
4. C.O. 444/2 Moor to C.O. No. 161 of 25 Sept. 1899; also C.O. 520/3 No. 293 of 19 Nov. 1900.
5. C.O. 444/3 No. 208 of 5 Dec. 1899 & Annual Report 1899/1900.

sometimes in settlements from the Cross River to the Niger... Their influence is predominant over these pagan tribes and as they have no good to say about the Government, their presence is a continual thorn in the side of the administration."¹

The precise nature and extent of Aro influence over a large part of Southern Nigeria at this period has yet not been adequately investigated to allow of categorical statements on the subject. Nevertheless, a reference to the socio-political structure of the predominant Ibo communities will perhaps explain why the Aro could have exploited the notorious Long Ju Ju to their great commercial and political advantage. In the absence of centralised authority among the Ibo tribe, the village elders of fragmentary communities were the promulgators of such laws as had not already formed part of recognised and approved social behaviour imposed by religious sanctions.²

The most potent single element in Ibo society was, therefore, religion. Priests occupied important social positions as mediators between god and society and between man and man. Even in the sphere of external affairs the influence of religion was dominant. The Aro Long Ju Ju was recognised as the supreme god by practically all the numerous village communities from the Cross River to the Niger. It was for this reason that it is permissible to assume that the Aros occupied a position of pre-eminence as Ju Ju agents. They were also able to deploy mercenary bands that went by the names of Abams and Adas.³

To deal with these Aros,⁴ Sir Ralph Moor, the High Commissioner, lost no time in expostulating with the Colonial Office that "it is by going to the heart of the matter at once and breaking up the power of the Aros that the country can be opened up and pacified." It may be mentioned here that Sir Ralph, who had been in charge of the Niger Coast Protectorate since 1896, was an advocate of what he himself called a "forward policy."⁵ His temperament was, therefore, not that of a man who would get unsavoury reports about the Aros without doing something. The Commissioner had been

1. Nigeria Pamphlets No. 16. *Exploration in S. Nigeria* by Steel. 1909.
2. Green: *Ibo Village Affairs* p. 145
Leith-Ross: *Notes on the Osu system among the Ibos of Owerri Province and Africa* Vol. X, 1937 p. 206.
Talbot: *Southern Nigeria* Vol. I p. 234.
3. Basden, *Niger Ibos* Ch. XXIX
Jordan: *Bp. Shanahan of S. Nigeria* p. 13.
Talbot, *Op. cit.* p. 234
Geary: *Op. cit.* p. 119.
4. Early Aro settlements are traceable today viz. Sjalli, Amokwe, Achi, Ihiala, Abakiliiki.
5. F.O. 2/84 Moor to F.O. 11 Sept. 1895.
also F.O. 2/85 26 Oct. 1895 Minutes by Sir C. Lloyd Hill and Macdonald's observations, 29 Oct. 1895.
F.O. 2/101 No. 50 of 14 June 1896.

assured by the representatives of the Niger Company at Oguta that owing to pernicious Aro influence the trade in oil had gone down substantially. At Atani, the Aros priests had reportedly "put juju" on the women, and threatened them with sterility if they cracked palm nuts for sale to the Europeans.

Shortly after, it was reported that some Abo and Aseh men had been rescued who had then exposed the nefarious fraud of the Long Ju Ju. It became the fashion to trace to Aro influence every local manifestation of opposition to British rule.

The Colonial Office was as yet not convinced that punitive action against the Aros was urgent or even necessary. Joseph Chamberlain minuted "I am not clear that this tribe may not be brought gradually under control without war."¹ Undaunted, Sir Ralph Moor, in submitting the estimates for 1901, which showed a spectacular increase from about £160,000 in 1899-1900 to £350,000 in 1900-1901, again pleaded very vigorously that as much of the revenue as possible should be diverted to extending effective government. This extension, he rather ingeniously maintained, was the only guarantee against the falling off of trade.

What constituted the last straw as regards the expediency of dealing militarily with the Aros occurred in June, 1901. The Acting High Commissioner, Leslie Probyn, relayed to the Colonial Office the report sent in by a Native Political Agent to the effect that the Aros had recently carried off many hundreds of Ibibios, some of whom had since been sold as slaves. Probyn had concluded that this exploit on the part of the Aros was an organised attempt to frustrate the efforts of the Natives of Opobo and Kwa Ibo districts to carry their trade into Ibo-land.²

The Colonial Office reaction to the report from Southern Nigeria was accurately expressed as follows: "the Aro raids reported in this despatch may be regarded as the technical justification for the expedition against the Aros which has already been decided to be necessary on more general grounds."³ Plans were forthwith set in motion for what was to be the last colossal punitive measure undertaken in the Protectorate. The Aros were believed to be ubiquitous. The scope of the proposed expedition was therefore extensive. Three areas were specifically marked out and embraced the Cross River, the neighbourhood of Oguta, and the territory between Onitsha and the westernmost portion of the Cross River.

1. C.O. 444/2 Minutes on 141 of Sept. 1899 by Antrobus, Selborne and Chamberlain.
C.O. 520/1 Moor to C.O. No. 79 of 23 March 1900.
2. C.O. 520/8 Probyn to C.O. No. 56 of 6 June 1901.
3. C.O. 520/8 Probyn to C.O. No. 200 of 6 June 1901. See Minutes by Butler.

The war aims were set out in the High Commissioner's Memorandum¹ of Instructions as follows:—

- (i) To stop slave raiding and trade
- (ii) To abolish the Ju Ju hierarchy of the Aro tribe
- (iii) To open the country to civilisation
- (iv) To stimulate legitimate trade among the natives
- (v) To inculcate the use of currency in lieu of slaves and brass rods and to establish a labour market.

The Secretary of State sent instructions to the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and to Lagos² to despatch contingents to Southern Nigeria. All the forces were then grouped in four columns with bases at Unwana, Itu, Akweta and Oguta. A converging movement would bring all the four columns to Bende and Arochukwu. (The latter place was the location of the Long Ju Ju shrine). Above all, "the natives must be made to fully understand that the government is their master and is determined to establish in and control their country."³

Whether or not the Aros knew what was coming, it is not possible to say, but in the event, they put no army in the field. The actual expedition against them was a sort of anti-climax in view of the importance that had been given to it by the gigantic preparations undertaken and the secret documents collected beforehand by the Protectorate Administration. Opposition to the passage of the troops was haphazard and encountered mainly in the districts that had always been turbulent. Local resistance was caused probably more by the unwillingness to surrender guns than by any consciousness of military alliance with the Aros.

On the other hand, the Administration conducted both military and diplomatic warfare, and places suspected as potential Aro allies were urged to refuse to *chop mbiam*⁴ with Aros. The Officer Commanding the Aro Field Forces, Lt.-Colonel Montanaro, did his best to make the expedition assume the requisite dignity expected of warfare. He issued directives to the sectional commanders and saw to it that regular bulletins were sent to the High Commissioner about the fortunes of the Field Forces. To reinforce the grandeur of the expedition, opposition was exaggerated. In fact, the Officer expressed his astonishment at the "formidable" opposition in his report of the capture of Arochukwu, as follows: "the enemy has shown himself to be a most persistent and dogged foe . . . I had no idea that savages would make such a stand."⁵

1. In C.O. 520/10 No. 381 of 24 Nov. 1901.
Burns: *History of Nigeria* p. 200.
2. One of the many indications of Joseph Chamberlain to amalgamate these administrative units into one Nigeria.
3. Moor: *Op cit.* Memorandum of Instructions.
4. *Chop Mbiam* was the local equivalent of a mutual assistance alliance.
5. C.O. 520/10 Moor to C.O. No. 435 of 28 December, 1901.

What actually took place was this. The expedition was launched on the 1st of December, 1901. Columns 1 and 3 started from Oguta and Akweta respectively, and on the 2nd of December met at Owerri and together marched on to Bende which was occupied on the 16th of the same month. Columns 2 and 4 began operations from the Cross River and scoured the districts around Itu and Ngwana. These then marched on to Arochukwu which was entered without opposition on the 24th of December.

The Supreme Commander assembled all the Aro "Chiefs" and people that were found and explained to them "the intentions of the Government." He reported that as far as he could gather from the general attitude of the people, he was convinced that they were rather inclined to welcome the advent of the government.¹ Nevertheless, a military commission was set up and those believed to be ringleaders were hanged on the spot. A comic episode occurred when the women of Arochukwu pleaded that the Long Ju Ju shrine should not be set on fire but should be taken out of the control of the Aro priest hierarchy into theirs. The Officer naturally declined the request and the "all powerful" supreme god ended its long-famous or notorious physical existence.

January, 1902, was occupied in scouring the country west of the Cross River. Various places were traversed, including Aba, Owerri, Asa. The High Commissioner, by telegram on the 30th of March, announced to the Colonial Office that the Aro expedition was successfully concluded. The usual congratulations followed. One performance by the Commanding Officer revealed the grave danger of giving expeditions of this kind an unnecessary military complexion. Two chiefs of Ikorana were tried by a military tribunal, charged with "knowingly doing acts calculated to imperil the success of a portion of His Majesty's forces."² The chiefs were found guilty on the grounds that they had professed ignorance when questioned, during the march on Arochukwu, of the whereabouts of the road thereto. They were now sentenced to penal servitude. The High Commissioner, Sir Ralph Moor, was himself horrified at these proceedings. The legal experts of the Colonial Office later observed that the native chiefs could not conceivably be amenable to the jurisdiction of a British military Court. The trial was therefore declared illegal and the fortunate chiefs went home to assume greatly enhanced local importance.

The area involved in the Aro expedition was estimated to have covered 6,000 square miles by the High Commissioner. Another material achievement of the venture was the confiscation of 25,000 war guns accumulated by the inhabitants over a number of years.³

1. C.O. 520/13 Moor to C.O. No. 17, 14 Jan. 1902
2. *Ibid.* Enclosure, Charge Sheet in No. 66 of 15 Feb.
also Minutes by Risley and Cox.
3. C.O. 520/14 Moor to C.O. No. 189, 24 April 1902.
Enclosure Memorandum concerning the Aro Expedition.

The remaining question was the political settlement of the conquered or pacified districts. On the 26th and 27th of March Sir Ralph held two meetings at Bende to which he invited the representatives of as many towns as possible. To these he explained why the Government had entered their towns by force of arms and what methods of control and good order in their towns the Government advocated. Bende was then made a District Headquarters. Native Courts were established here and at Arochukwu.

Companies of the South Nigeria Regiment were stationed at Aba and Owerri where the High Commissioner proposed shortly to establish District Headquarters.

The energies of the Administration had been taken up almost exclusively with the preparations for, and the execution of, the Aro expedition during the years 1900 to 1902. As already pointed out, the Aros had been considered the last formidable obstacle to the consolidation of imperial government in what is today the Eastern Region. The Colonial Office, although it had approved the Aro Expedition, never felt quite at ease in the face of the ironical contingency of extending His Majesty's Protectorate by means of conquest. A new method owed its adoption to the advocacy of the ablest of the early administrators, Fosbery, expressed as follows:—

“Our object is to pacify the country by pacific measures. and to effect this, the feelings of the natives must be taken into consideration.”¹

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1. C.O. 520/16 Moor to C.O. No. 574 of 9 Dec. 1902.

See Enclosure, Report by Divisional Commissioner, Central Division.
Ibid. No. 549 of 1 Dec. 1902.

S. Nigeria Gazette, 1903. Despatch from Chamberlain dated 25 July 1903, about the retirement of Sir Ralph Moor.

THE ROCK GONG COMPLEX TODAY AND IN PREHISTORIC TIMES

by

B. E. B. FAGG

UNTIL 1954 the only cave paintings known to exist in Nigeria were at Nok in Southern Zaria Province and thought to be less than fifteen years old. They consisted of a single stylised figure of a man surrounded by innumerable finger prints in white pigment, and were said to have been painted on the vertical rock face during initiation rites. In view of the phenomenal richness of rock art surviving in the dry Sahara region it was no surprise to hear early in 1954 that an important group of rock paintings in the comparatively dry environment of Birnin Kudu had been reported to a touring administrative officer.¹ Always known to the local inhabitants,² this information was offered in response to an appeal for notes of local historical interest for publication in a vernacular newspaper.

The Rock Paintings of Birnin Kudu

The Birnin Kudu rock paintings owe their survival to a combination of their physical protection from rain-water by overhanging rocks and the absence of sustained atmospheric humidity due to the comparatively low annual rainfall of less than thirty inches. The rain usually falls in violent outbursts followed by bright sunshine. A number of the best protected paintings still have the pigment more or less intact, though many are visible only from the faint stain left in the rock face by the pigment which has long ago completely disappeared. Others have been preserved in part only, the rest of the paint having been entirely obliterated by runnels of rain water which, due to the configuration of the rock ceilings, have by-passed the drip line. The paintings which still survive today probably, therefore, represent a very small proportion of those originally painted.

The subject matter of the paintings, which can be divided stylistically into four main styles and three sub-styles, consists of cattle and a few enigmatical designs. The cattle fall into two main categories, both depicting humpless species. The earlier paintings (although it should be stressed that there is no evidence that the whole series covers a very long span of time) depict long-bodied animals with long

1. Another group has recently been reported by an administrative officer from a remote village North of Bauchi.
2. Mr. R. B. Woodrooffe of the Agricultural Department at Birnin Kudu has heard reports from several independent sources that, according to tradition, the paintings were already there when Baud'a was founded about sixty years before the foundation of Kano, which took place about 1000 A.D., according to the Kano Chronicle.

spreading or converging horns and probably represent the so-called Hamitic Long-horn cattle. The direct descendants of these animals are now to be found only in the Fouta Djalon of French Guinea. The other group depicts thick-bodied, short-legged and short-horned cattle which are almost certainly the West African Short-horn (*Bos Brachyceros*) known to the Hausa as *muturu*, which survive in isolated herds in the savannah further to the South, and as the smaller dwarf short-horn in the rain forest region of the Guinea Coast.

Among the designs there is one which can be exactly paralleled in two similar examples at Dermel Tal near Colomb Bechar in Algeria, which tends to suggest both a Saharan and probably North African origin for the art style and a trans-Saharan migration route for the cattle. This piece of evidence is valuable in arriving at a tentative date for the paintings, because the Sahara could hardly have been crossed by cattle much later than the beginning of the Christian era. The only other suggestive, though far from conclusive, evidence is provided by a trial excavation at Dutsen Mesa where pigment was found in the same horizon as iron arrow-heads and also with late Stone Age material. A single fragment of a stone bangle suggests a possible link with the Epineolithic Culture of Nok which is thought on geological grounds to be about 2,000 years old.

The weight of evidence at present suggests a tentative date for the cave paintings of about the beginning of the Christian era, which is important to the main purpose of this paper, the study of Nigerian rock gongs.

The Rock Gongs of Birnin Kudu

Rock gongs were first discovered and recorded at Birnin Kudu in June, 1955, while the paintings were being copied and a trial trench was being excavated in front of a cave at Dutsen Mesa.

They were, in fact, found originally in an archaeological context, for the distribution of ringing rocks which were used as gongs was found to be in significant clusters close to the painted rock shelters, whereas ringing rocks bearing no sign of use can be found throughout the area of granite outcrops covering some two square miles around the newly-rebuilt town of Birnin Kudu astride the main Kano-Eastern road.

The first to be found was a slab of granite roughly four feet long by twenty inches wide and about the same in depth. It was covered with innumerable bruises from hammering, and there were many depressions of various shapes and sizes for which no obvious explanation offered itself. The hammer marks were everywhere, on the vertical as well as the horizontal faces, which seemed to preclude their use as small millstones. I was told that the young boys of Birnin Kudu amuse themselves by hammering on the rock to produce a metallic bell-note. As this could hardly explain the amount of wear on this rock, it was obviously worthwhile pursuing the possibility that it had been used in antiquity and that there were others like it.

It was lying on a gently sloping ledge about twelve feet above ground level under a massive overhang of rock, with only about two feet six inches of head-room (*Fig. 1.*). The ceiling, within the "drip-line," had the remains of a number of bovine paintings, several of which had been partly obliterated by rain-water trickling from above. About six feet away there was a painting in red of a cow feeding a calf—one of the few examples of composition among the paintings at Birnin Kudu. There was therefore from the beginning the possibility that the rock music might be associated with the cave paintings. About ten feet below the upper ledge was a lower one with about two feet of head-room but there was no trace of any paintings. There was, however, a small pillar of granite rather less than a foot in diameter wedged tight between the floor and the ceiling. It had a ringing tone and had been struck considerably.

The spectacular rock shelter of Dutsen Habude (*Fig. 2*), which has two of the finest and best-preserved paintings of all (*Fig. 3*), had many hammered surfaces on three or four boulders and masses of solid granite which gave various notes. There was one single tongue of rock with a very fine ringing tone protruding horizontally, being wedged between huge masses of rock at about eye-level for a man standing on the main ledge (*Fig. 4*). This specimen, which has a fine metallic tone, showed considerable signs of use but *no evidence of recent hammering*. It is out of the reach of children.

But the most convincing evidence that the rock gongs are topographically related to the painted rock shelters is at Dutsen Mesa, the first of the caves to be protected and declared an ancient monument (*Fig. 5*). The entire outcrop of Dutsen Mesa was very carefully examined for ringing rocks and there were many of them. But it was only within an arc of about 50 feet from the paintings that any rock gongs were found. There were no less than ten, several of them multiple. There are four rocky hills at this site, surrounding a flat expanse of farmland. Of these, Dutsen Mesa is one, with the painted cave facing the open space. The other three hills were also very carefully examined for rock gongs and unused ringing rocks. The first hill had a single rock gong, the second three multiple gongs and the third a single rock gong, all facing inwards towards the cave site. It is difficult, indeed, to imagine how this distribution could be unconnected with the cave paintings. The small caves of Dutsen Murufu, however, offer the best opportunity for a detailed musical study of the rock gongs, and at the same time a hint of their probable ritual significance (*Figs. 6, 7, 8*).

When he heard of my interest in rock gongs at the other sites, the District Head, Sarkin Kudu, informed me that the children of the town oftengo to Dutsen Murufu to hammer on the slabs of rock to play. Investigation soon revealed some very faint paintings which had not previously been known about. These included a fine painting of a shorthorned bull in red pigment, of which only a stain in the rock surface remains. The Sarkin Kudu then informed me of a

curious custom which is not known to be practised elsewhere in Kano Emirate and which takes place exactly at this spot. Every bride born in Birnin Kudu, which is a staunchly Mohammedan town, must go to this rock shelter early in the morning on her wedding day and remain there until late in the afternoon, alone or in company with other brides. No rites of any kind are said to take place and the bride returns to the town in the late afternoon for the marriage ceremonies. This rock shelter is about two miles from the old town but is very close to the original site of Baud'a, the town which preceded the foundation of Birnin Kudu and may have been established there as long ago as about 940 A.D. Since the paintings at Dutsen Mesa were supposed, according to the reports mentioned in the footnote above, to have been there at that time, it seems quite likely that this marriage custom may be at least as old as the original settlement of Baud'a.

At the same site, there are rock slides which are still in frequent use by the children of the town when they play on the rock gongs (*Fig. 9*). It is alleged that no ritual or ceremony of any sort is associated with these children's games, but much more investigation is necessary before this statement can be accepted without reserve.

There are also a few shallow horizontal grooves in the solid granite close to these rock shelters of a type which elsewhere in Birnin Kudu are said to be used for practice in grinding grain by the unmarried girls.

Here at Birnin Kudu, therefore, we had found a complex whose purpose and significance began to become evident as our researches were extended to other parts of the country. Although the rock gongs of Birnin Kudu could plausibly be regarded as archaeological specimens associated with the rock paintings (which were the only ones known in Nigeria), we nevertheless made efforts to find similar phenomena elsewhere in Nigeria, beginning with the high plateau, and it was not long before we were rewarded. Remembering having seen in 1940 near Bokkos a hammered slab of rock whose purpose I could not interpret, I revisited the site and found the rock half embedded in a shrine, which made investigation difficult. I began to question the villagers and soon an inquisitive crowd had collected. They firmly denied that such things exist or had ever been heard of, but someone in the crowd asked why I was seeking this information and what was my precise business. While I was explaining, two men in the crowd of remote villagers declared that they had visited the Jos Museum and that it would be quite safe to tell me the facts. Without quite abandoning their caution, they admitted that rocks struck with pebbles are known to ring like a bell at the neighbouring village of Mbar about six miles due West. They omitted to say, however, that two very fine specimens existed within two miles and that the sites could actually be seen from the hill-top of Rui where we were standing. Following this discovery, it has been possible to pursue the study of these rock gongs by enquiry and surface

explanation, as opportunity has offered in many areas where suitable rocks occur, and rarely have the investigations proved negative.

The Rock Gongs of the Mbar-Bokkos-Daffo Area

At Mbar I met the same reluctance to admit the existence of rock gongs but eventually, again through the intervention of a man who had paid a visit to the Museum, I was taken to see them (*Figs. 10, 11*). From that time onwards I ceased to enquire whether rock gongs existed and asked specifically if I might have permission to see them (whether I knew of their existence or not), using in turn all the vernacular names I knew for them. This approach saved a great deal of time and has made it possible to assemble considerable evidence of their distribution in Nigeria.

There are six different rock gongs so far known at Mbar, of which four are said to be used in the initiation ceremonies for boys held every seven years, one for the annual puberty ceremonies for girls and one for casual singing and merry-making in a compound inside the village itself. The word for rock gong in the Ron language at Mbar is variously *Gwangalan* or *Kungereng*, both clearly onomatopoeic in origin.

The first is a flat slab of rock in the open on the side of a small valley just south of the village. It is poised on some boulders so as to project about two feet over the edge. When struck at the end it gives a surprisingly metallic tone. Across the small valley are some caves formed by the spalling off of huge slabs of granite. One of these is lying more or less horizontally and protected from the weather by other rock slabs. An area of about a square yard by about four inches thick has been considerably weathered by hammering. This gong has been recently used and, according to my information, this was six years ago at the last seven-yearly initiation rites. The rites last for two months, during which time the boys, though actually sleeping at home, spend all the hours of daylight in seclusion and under instruction in this valley. On the day of the circumcision operation a dance is held in the valley. Some of the boys play the dancing rhythms on the rock gongs, while the others dance to summon their courage for the ordeal of circumcision which takes place in a sacred grove half a mile to the South-East.

Two other gongs exist among a cluster of huge rocks three quarters of a mile to the South-West. No information is yet available about their use, though one of them must be of considerable antiquity to judge by the depth of wear.

The fifth example on the North side of the village, consists of a large slab of rock poised on edge. Though not deeply weathered it is evidently much used. There were eight moderately worn depressions, whose tones varied only slightly. A number of songs accompanied by the rock gongs were recorded at this site, including the songs sung by the initiates to raise their courage just before entering the sacred grove for the circumcision operation.

The sixth gong at Mbar has not yet been shown to me. It was said to be difficult to reach because of thick grass and boulders and to resonate only feebly at present because it is choked by an excess of goat dung. As it is said to be used at annual puberty ceremonies for girls, there may be other reasons why I was not taken to see it.

At Jukudel, about a mile South-West of Bokkos, there is a fine massive rock gong, as big as a large dining-table, in the open air. It had been struck in half a dozen places on the eastern extremity. It was said to be used as a child's game and not be used by grown men.

At Mandarke, about three-quarters of a mile S.S.E. of Jukudel, there are rock gongs which merely consist of the edges of huge exfoliations which have not yet broken clear of the granite mass. (Fig. 12).

At about 100 yards East of the outskirts of Bokkos itself there is a very interesting rock gong, whose two rows of hammer marks are clearly visible from the village. This gong originally measured about eight feet by five feet (as can be seen by weather marks on the rock mass below), but was smashed approximately in half by prisoners who were sent from Pankshin in 1951 to prepare building stone for a new dispensary. Fortunately, the villagers then intervened and half of the gong remained intact. This was lifted and a piece of the freshly broken rock, about nine inches high, was wedged underneath, apparently to improve the tone. The end which had formerly been struck was completely quarried away and the new striking places are at the opposite end.

This gong provides evidence that the desired notes are selected on a natural rock slab, and that rock wedges are used to improve the tone: it also gives a very approximate indication of the rate of wear over the last five years, on the basis of its use for perhaps an hour or two at a time, seven or eight times a month. The latter evidence must be used with reserve but does give an approximate indication of the rate of wear, for the hammered places are no deeper or larger than the depression in the palm of a man's hand, whereas there are depressions at Birnin Kudu which have been worn deeper than a discarded grinding stone. The Ron tribe of Bokkos itself say that their name for rock gong is *Hayi*.

At Daflo there are rock gongs in the surrounding hamlets. At Fangai, one mile to the North, I was shown two examples in the open air high on a hill-side, which are in current use (Fig. 13). I was told that there were no others in the vicinity, but exploration in some caves revealed an old patinated one which the villagers claimed ignorance of. At Daflo the name for rock gong is *Kongworiang*.

At Batura there is a rock gong close to the stone causeway similar to the one at Mandarke and a domestic specimen weighing less than two hundredweight, with a fine ringing tone. It has hardly yet been used and must have been brought recently to the compound. There is another gong used at the Batura circumcision rites which has not yet been visited.

Rock Gongs of the Nok-Chori-Kwoi Area in Southern Zaria Province

Considering the exceptional archaeological collections which have been found in the Nok valley, it was not surprising to find that rock gongs exist there as well as in the surrounding villages. There are three groups of them half-way up the hill, just above the present village of Nok. Before the village moved down from the hill-top (gradually during the last forty years), these gongs would have been at the lower edge of the village. Others undoubtedly exist in the old village area, but no attempt has yet been made to visit them.

The most interesting group is situated approximately 100 feet above the track which passes through Nok, and is within 400 or 500 feet of the house of the present chief priest. The vast mass of granite which forms the Nok hills has, at this point, weathered into gigantic slabs of rock in tabular form and as much as eight feet thick. There are narrow passage-ways climbing steeply between these blocks leading up to a cave with a very low roof, which is inclined downwards into the hill. At the back of the cave are the rock gongs, but those who play on them are forced to crouch or sit, or even to lie on their sides.

All the major ceremonies at Nok begin with a visit to this cave before the celebrants assemble for the main festivities in the dancing arena in the centre of the village. Certain specific ceremonies take place at the cave of the rock gongs, including the fertility rites just prior to the harvest, during August, of the first *acha* (a diminutive grain crop—*penisetum exiguus*). Recording apparatus was taken up the hill and some of the current popular songs were recorded, songs describing popular events, satirising modern fashions, and generally of a non-religious type classified by my informant as “high-life”. One of the songs lampoons a very important local personage, even making very serious accusations against him. There was evident delight at being able to make this attack in public without risking any ill consequences, for the whole village takes part in the songs. Another song describes the joy of the young people of Nok at a reform of the rules of marriage carried out in 1952 by the chief and elders with the universal agreement of the community, when the two exogamous clans were split into four, and marriage became very much easier to contract.

At Chori, there is a series of rock gongs on a horizontal ledge high up on the cliff with an overhanging shelter overlooking Anguwan Galadima. They have a fine ringing tone which echoes through the Chori Hills.

At Nok some of the rock gongs were used as warning bells to recall men who were out farming in the plains when the look-out men on the hills sighted the white gowns of Hausa and Fulani cavalry in the distance.

At Kwoi there are some very remarkable rock slides approximately 150 feet long. The boys slide helter-skelter and at great speed down these slides, sitting on rock sledges which are sometimes wrapped in grass or leaves. The slide marks on the rocks are deeply worn

and very smooth and boys sometimes slide down without using a sledge. A few feet away there are rock gongs with a hollow ringing sound. They consist of incipient exfoliations and have been considerably used, but their precise purpose is not known.

The Jaba name for rock slide is *Kihguhyuo* and for rock gong *Kuge*. This is the same as the Hausa word for "double iron gong." The name for the girls' grinding grove is *Kwokdyok*.

The Rock Gongs of the Jos-Fobur Area

Efforts to find rock gongs close to Jos were soon successful when a very fine rock gong was discovered at Gwong, about one mile due East of Jos across the Delimi River. This was followed by the discovery of two other groups about a mile away at Gingiring and at Tula. None of these rock gongs is in use today and the Jarawa denied all knowledge of their existence or purpose, and it seems likely that they have been disused for a very long period. One of the two rock gongs at Tula is a thin concave-convex granite flake which appears to have spalled off due to the pressure of a gigantic boulder impinging on a sharp edge. The flake has lodged firmly in a narrow corridor between two large rocks. It has an exceptionally fine metallic tone and has been much used in antiquity, probably only by young boys, for it is almost impossible of access to a grown man. It was found by a boy of six years who was small enough to crawl through the gallery.

On enquiring from the Jarawa living in the neighbourhood of Jos, I was informed that their *Kumusu* or initiation rites are held at Fobur, about eighteen miles South-East of Jos in the foothills of the Shere mountains, just below Shere South peak. Enquiries there soon confirmed that there is a rock gong, and by arrangement with the priest I was taken to see it. It is about three miles South of the foot of the mountain in an exposed position on the side of a valley at Angwan Madaki. It consists of a single slab of rock whose maximum dimensions are about five feet wide by twelve inches thick and which has exfoliated from a large boulder of granite (Fig. 14). It has an unusually wide range of notes, one of which is more "metallic" than any other so far found in Nigeria.

The priest agreed to the recording of the essential elements in the initiation music, which is played at the Kumusu festival every seven years. The recordings were made in April, 1956. The novitiates have been undergoing training and have just been circumcised. The priest goes to the rock gong in the evening and strikes seven times to inform the village that the festival is to be held on the following morning. I have heard the gong from a distance of more than a mile and can well believe my informants who say it is clearly audible at the foot of the mountain three miles away. In ideal conditions the sound could well carry further still. A number of *muturu* cattle (the short-horn species represented in the Birnin Kudu cave paintings) are slaughtered for the feast.

On the following morning, the initiates go to the rock gong with the priest and sing their final songs before going to the dancing area to join the rest of the villagers who have already begun the dance.

Of the three songs recorded, the first is a hymn of thanksgiving for the successful completion of the period of initiation. The second describes the acute pain inflicted by the circumcision knife. The third is a rollicking song of anticipation of the feast to come. Singing this lustily, they cross the valley, following the priest who leads them into manhood.

Two secular songs were also recorded at the rock gong at Fobur. One is a song of praise for a very old woman named Martanya, who is congratulated for having lived to such an advanced age. They sing "May many others do the same." The song was composed two years ago and Martanya is still alive.

The other song was composed about twenty years ago, when the entire village came to build the new chief's compound at Fobur. They performed a *gayya*, which can best be described as voluntary community work in which all able-bodied villagers take part. The song has a catching lilt which is very conducive to the sort of work required—the digging of the soil, the treading of the mud, rolling of balls of mud and throwing them up to the builders on the wall.

The Jarawa name for rock gong is *Kula Kubok*, for rock slide *Ahohwo*, and for grinding groove, *Kutakwo*.

In all the examples quoted above, the rock gongs appear to be used rather like drums, as a rhythmic accompaniment for singing, and not more than two or three distinct notes are used at any time. The remarkable series of rock gongs at Birnin Kudu, however, may possibly have been used as *ensemble instruments*, for there is a very wide range of notes available, and many have been very deeply worn.

Rock Gongs Elsewhere in Nigeria

Reports from reliable informants (so far unconfirmed) have been received of the contemporary use of rock gongs from as far afield as Gwoza (Northern Cameroons), Shira (Bauchi), Hinna and Bage (Gongola Valley), Zaria, Chafe, near Gusau, and Igbetti in the Western Region (*Man*, 1956: 23). To these I would add the probability that a ringing rock showing signs of use (seen by me in December, 1955) at the top of Olumo Rock at Abeokuta has been used at some period as a rock gong, though enquiries (I am indebted for these to Mr. P.O. Ogunbowale of Ijebu Ode) have not established that it was so used by the Yoruba.

The rock gong reported by Mr. Morton-Williams at the deserted site of Old Oyo (*Man, op. cit.*) was seen by me in November, 1956, and several other very interesting specimens were found in the caves close to the ruins of the Afin in the centre of the town. Signs of use were extensive (though not so deep as on the specimens at Birnin Kudu), and they were patinated, as would be expected since they are unlikely to have been used since about 1837, when the city was

abandoned. They look fresher, however, than many of the rock gongs found in similar conditions in Northern Nigeria, which gives an interesting, though very approximate, indication of relative age.

I have received a report from the Reverend G. D. Schneider that what appear to be rock gongs exist East of Su in the Kimbi River Area of Bamenda, and North of Lemin on the Mambila Plateau in the southernmost part of Adamawa Province. I have also received a report from Mr. D. W. Arnott of the School of Oriental and African Studies (late Administrative Officer, Northern Region) that rock gongs exist near Pambeguwa on the Jos-Kaduna road and their local name is *Kwereng dutse*.

I have been told by Alhaji Mohamedu Munir, M.H.R., that rock gongs used to exist at Katsina (they were destroyed for use as building stone), where they were associated with the legend of the bride being turned to stone, which is almost exactly paralleled at Amaryan Dutse in the Kufena Hills, shown to me by Mr. John W. Court of the Education Department. A similar legend appears to be associated with the rock gongs of Shira. The bride's presents of calabashes and metal bowls were turned to stone with their owner, and they can still be identified by the different sounds which issue when the rocks are struck.

I have been informed by a Fulani living near Jos that there are rock gongs at Kumbo, South of Gombe, used for secret rites in caves by the Bororo.¹ At Kangimi, about eight miles from the junction of the Jos, Kaduna and Zaria main roads, the Hausa have rock gongs (local name *Gwagwa*) which are played at the time of circumcision, though the population of the village is Mohammedan. This information was given to me while I was waiting on the roadside with a mechanical fault in my car. In similar circumstances I found two rock gongs which had not been recently used, near Tabula on the Ningi-Lirue road.

From this brief distribution list of the current use of rock gongs, which has been compiled more or less from chance enquiries, it is clear that rock gongs are likely to be found to be used or have been used in most parts of Nigeria where suitable rocks occur.

Rock Gongs and Rock Slides in other parts of Africa

The earliest observation of rock gongs in Africa known to me at present was made by Mr. M.H.V. Fleming in the Sudan in 1929 (*Man*, 1956: 23). I have recently been informed by Mr. O.G.S. Crawford that on a visit to Jebel Sagadi, a granite outcrop about fifteen miles from Jebel Moya in the Sudan, to study some red rock paintings of giraffe,

1. I am indebted to Mrs. H. F. C. Smith of University College, Ibadan, for information concerning a rock gong at a nearby place called Kumbo. It is situated on a hill called Dutsen Bima and was used by the pagans as an alarm bell to warn of approaching Fulani. It is associated in local tradition with the appearance of phantom horsemen. It has been visited several times by visiting Europeans and there is a story that one or two of these have mysteriously disappeared while investigating the gong.

ED.



FIG. 1. Site of the discovery of the first rock gong in the upper rock shelter at Dutsen Zango, Birnin Kudu. On the ceiling above the gong there are a number of paintings, mostly fragmentary. There is another rock gong hidden in the lower shelter.

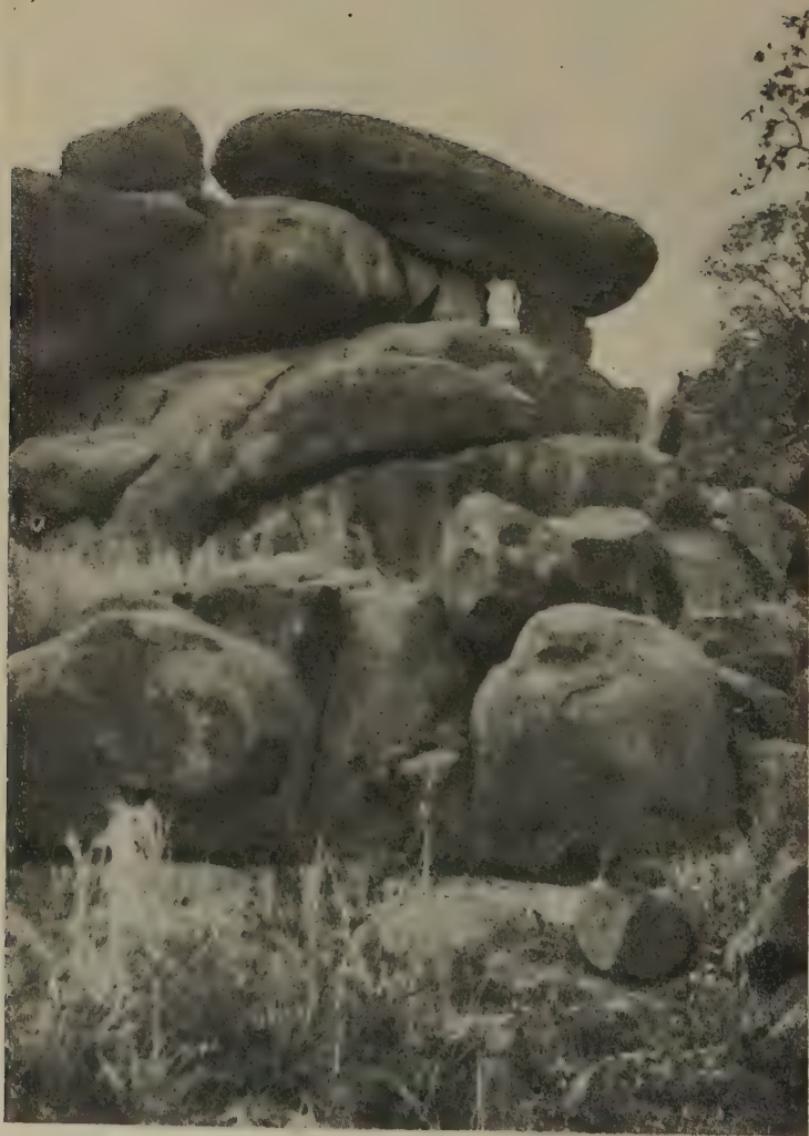
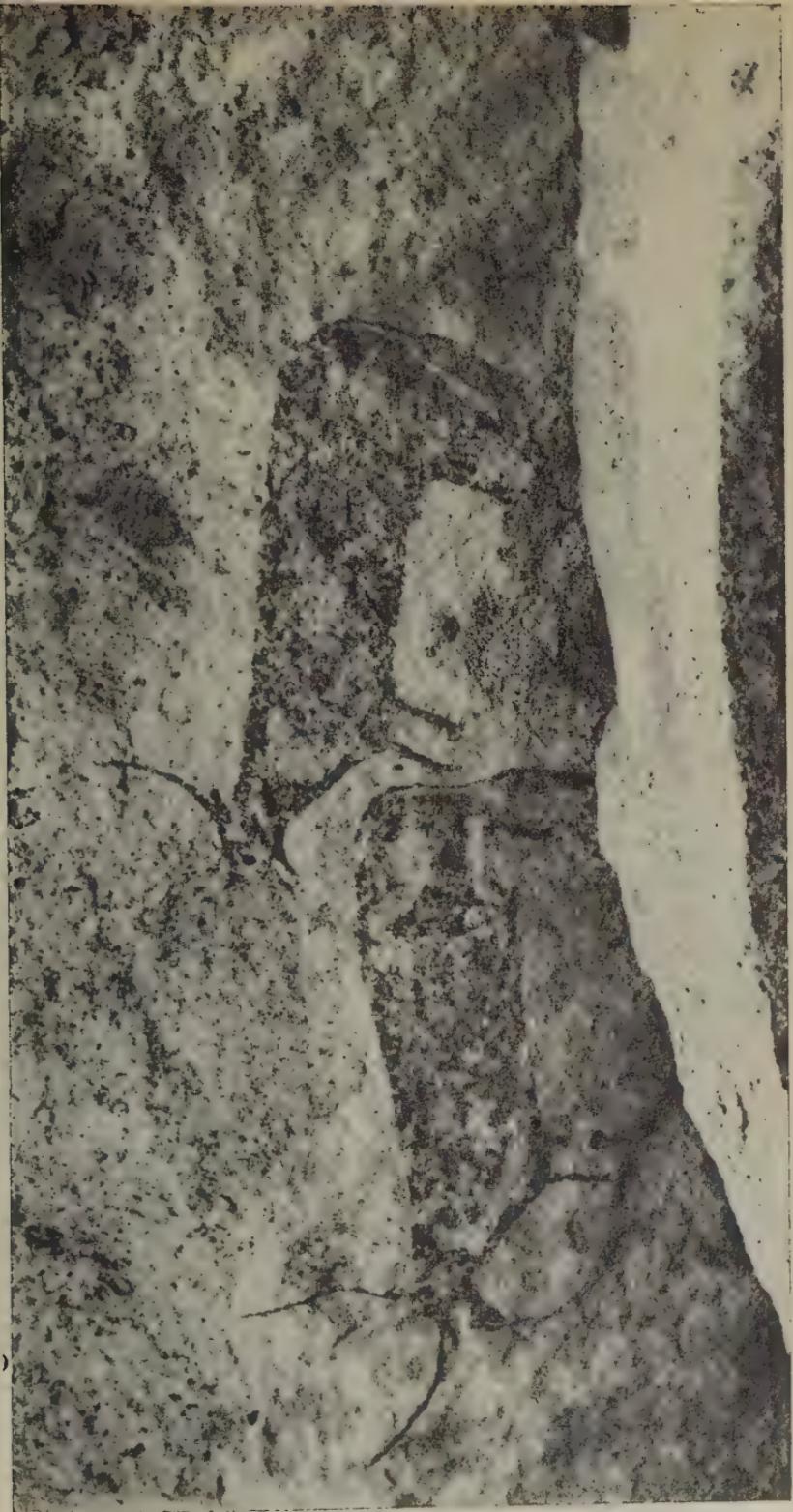


FIG. 2. *The painted rock shelter at Dutsen Habude showing rock gongs*

FIG. 3. Two long-horned humpless cows (probably Hamitic Longhorns) painted on the ceiling of the rock shelter at Dutsen Habude. In the foreground is the back of one of the rock gongs



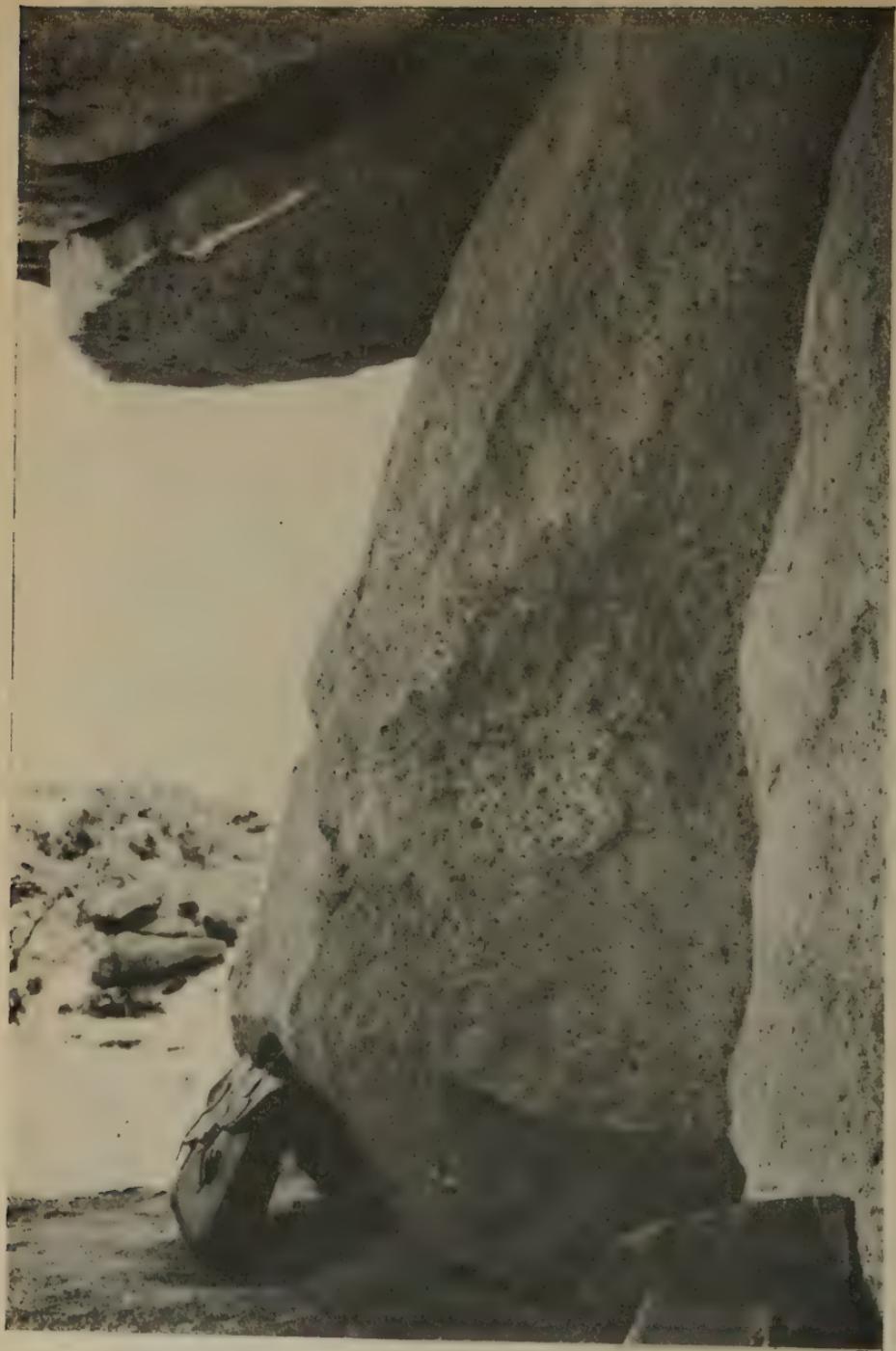


FIG. 4. Two types of rock gong at Dutsen Habude. The upper one is a tongue-like slab of granite wedged firmly between the upper massive boulder and the smaller boulder below, itself a rock gong. Clear signs of wear are visible on the edge of and underneath the upper specimen, and in two places on the lower one

FIG. 4a. Detail of horizontal rock gong shown in Fig. 4.





FIG. 5. View of rock shelter at Dutsen Mesa, Birnin Kudu, where the paintings have been protected by a steel screen. A. and B. are rock gongs. C. marks the entrance to a long gallery giving access to several others. D. marks the entrance to a choked-up cave whose excavation is expected to help the interpretation of the rock paintings and rock gongs



FIG. 6. Entrance to small cave containing several rock gongs
in various stages of wear

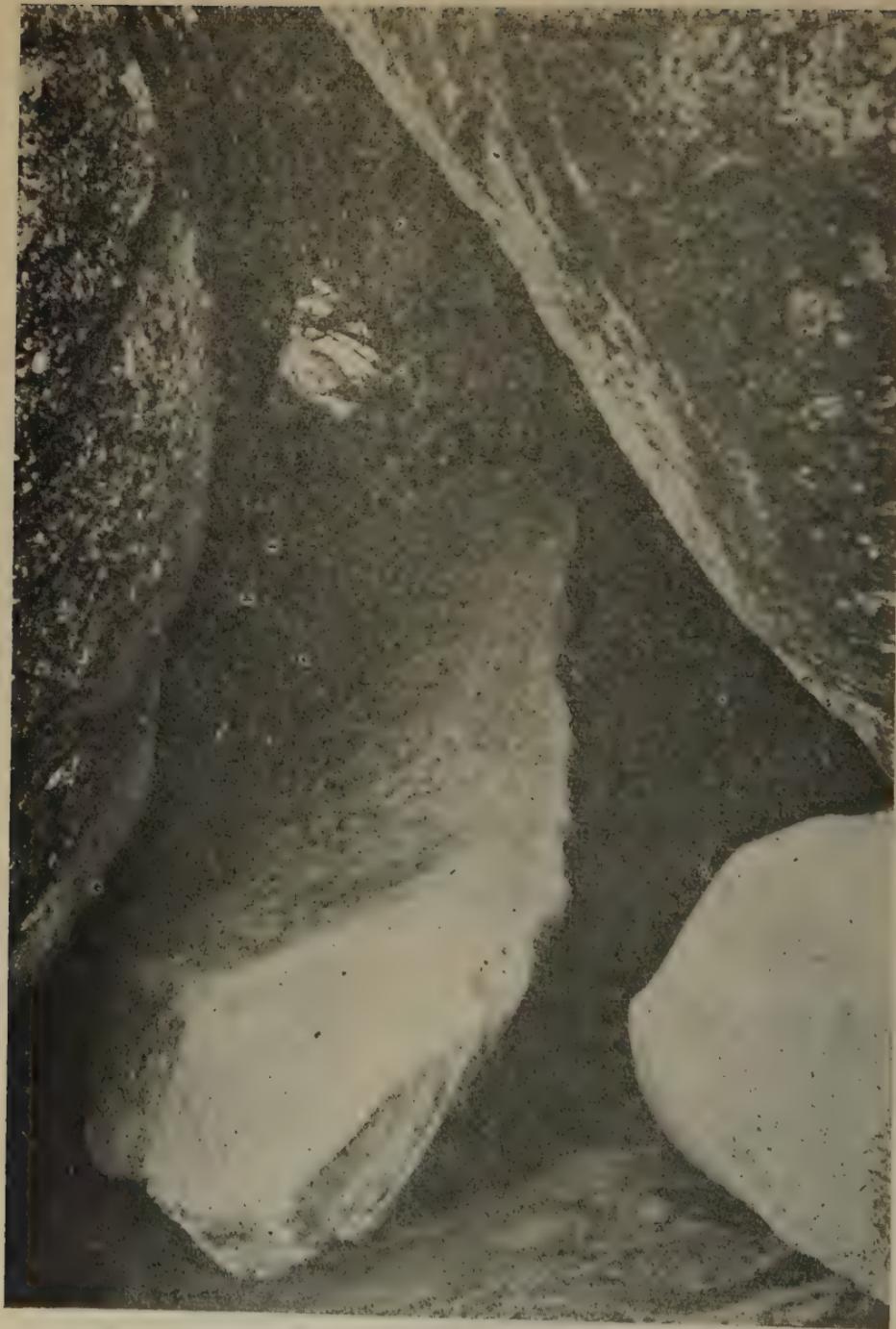


FIG. 7. *The main multiple rock gong at Dutsen Murufu, Birnin Kudu. The other side of the boulder at the right-hand side is one of a group of rock gongs in the small adjacent shelter*

FIG. 8. Enlargement of detail obscured by shadows in Fig. 6, showing depth of wear, which must indicate considerable age

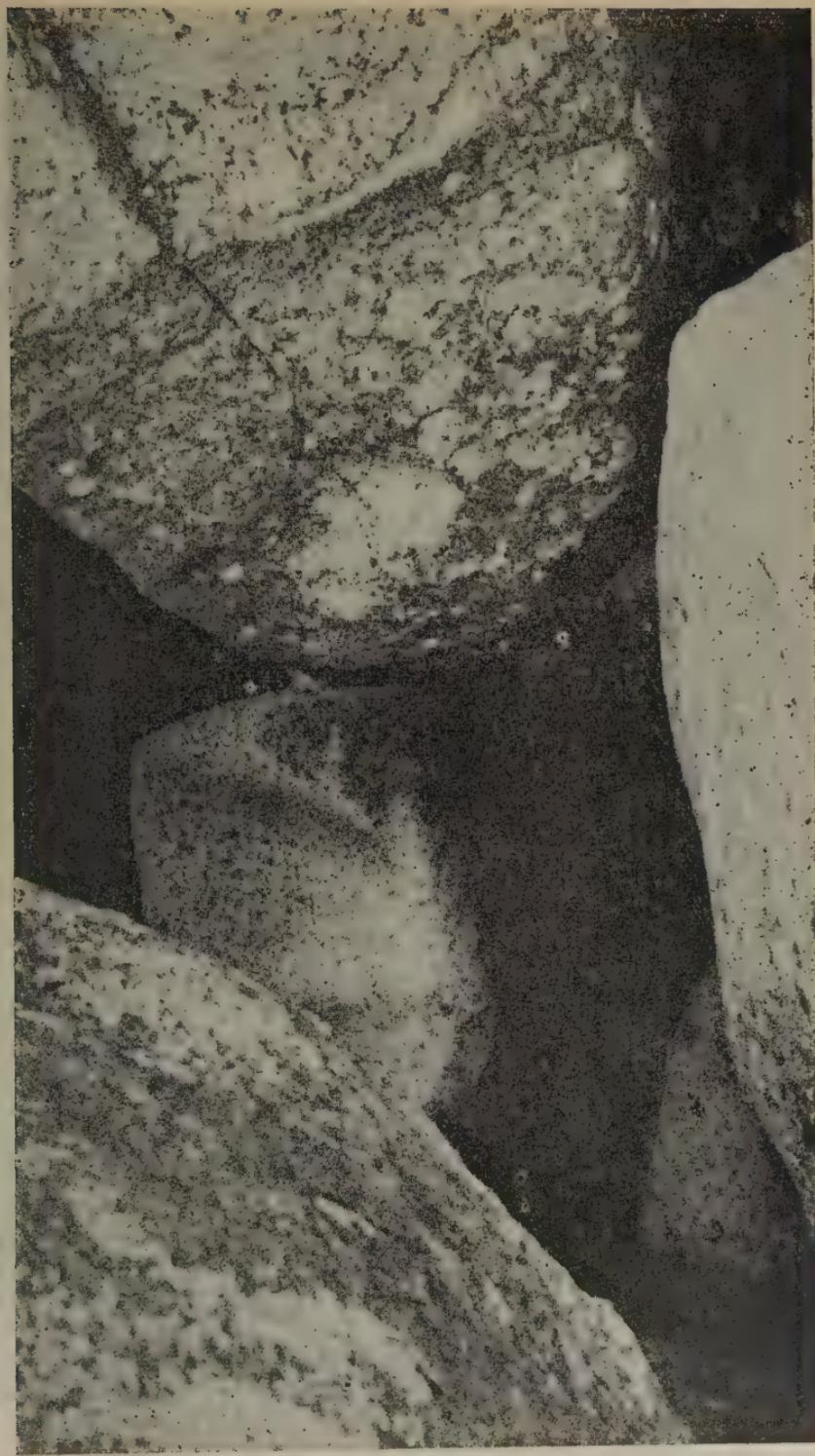




FIG. 9. The rock slide at Dutsen Murufu, Birnin Kudu, showing the extent of the wear on the surface of the granite



FIG. 10. Rock gong in village at Mbar, near Bokkos, said to be used only for merry-making. The men are singing to the rhythms beaten out on the rock gong

FIG. 11. Flat rock gong with twelve well-worn striking places, situated in a sacred cave not far from Mbar Village, near Bokkos



FIG. 12. Exfoliations of granite at the deserted village of Mandarke, near Bokkos, which are used as rock gongs by the children from neighbouring villages



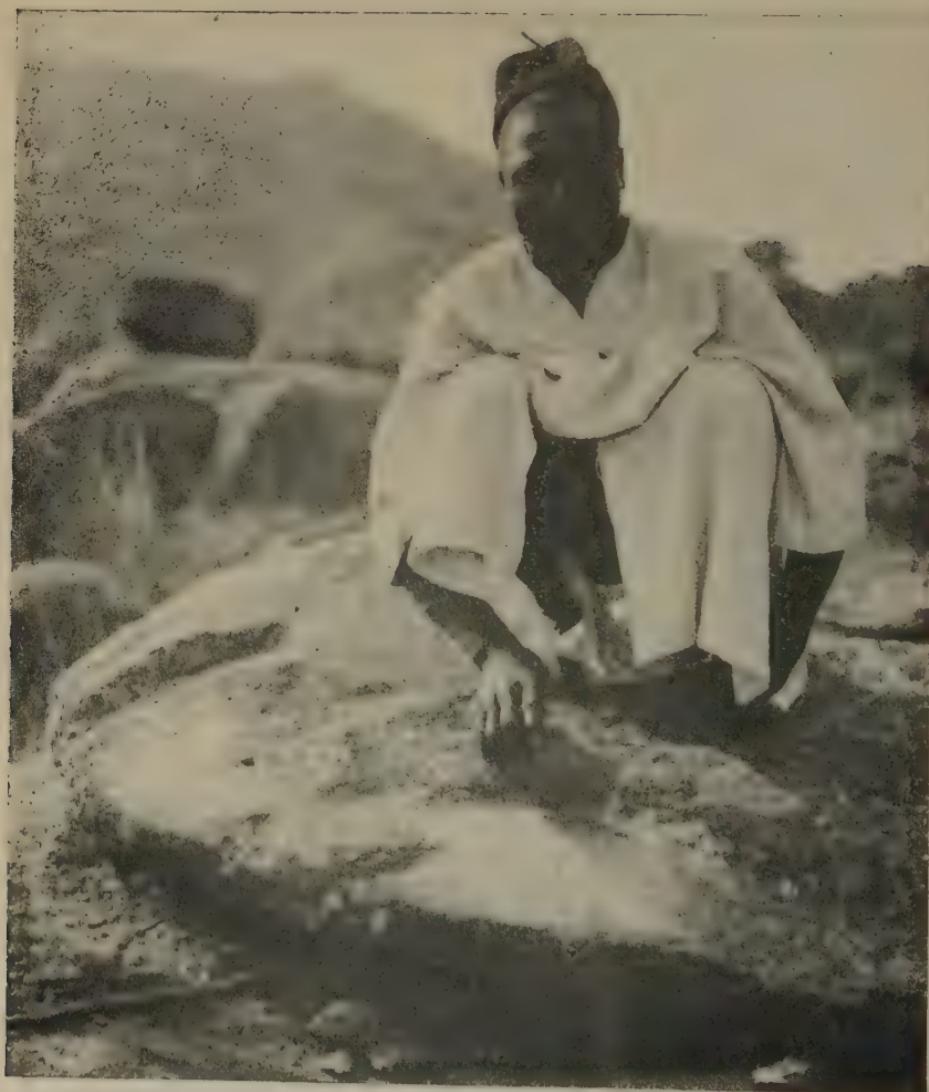


FIG. 13. Rock gong in use at Fangai, near Bokkos

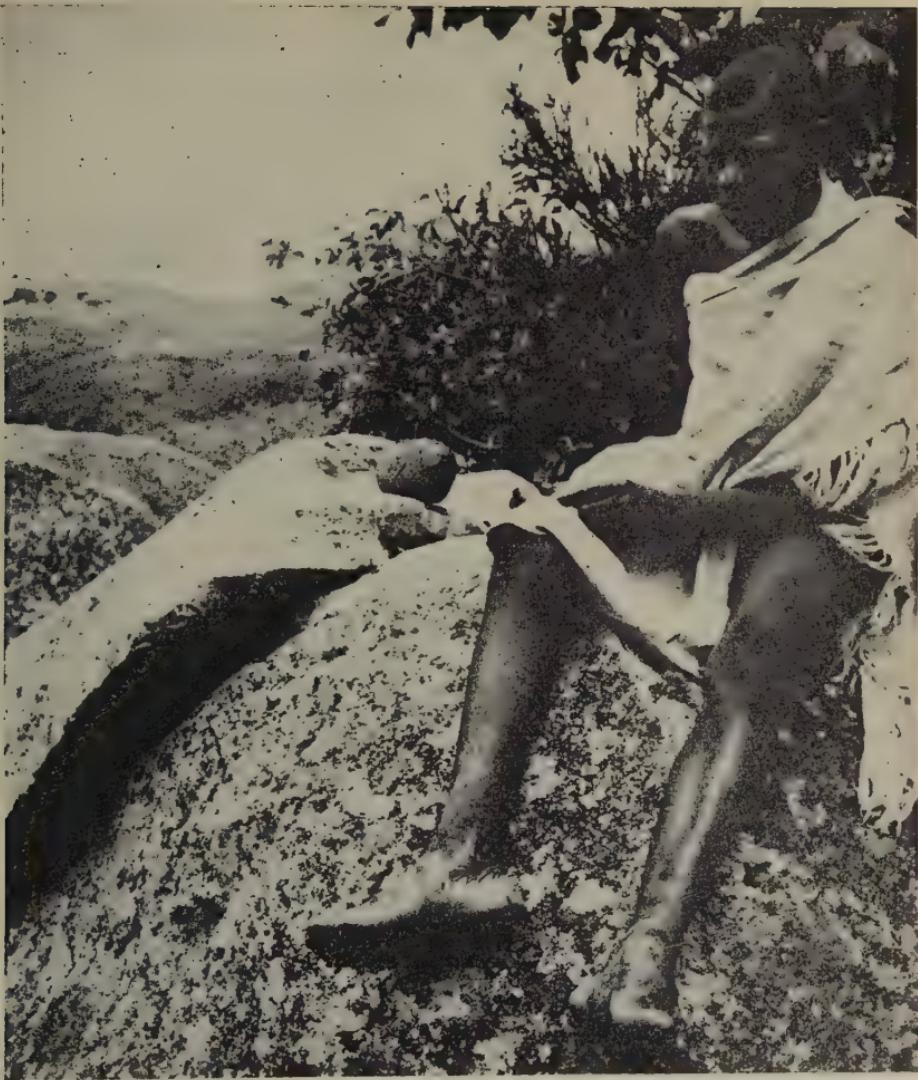


FIG. 14. *The rock gong at Fobur about 18 miles East-south-east of Jos. This gong can often be heard three miles away*

FIG. 15. Rock gong in a cave close to Dutsen Zango, Birnin Kudu. The rock gong associated with the Celtic Saint St. Gildas in Brittany is very similar in size and shape to this specimen

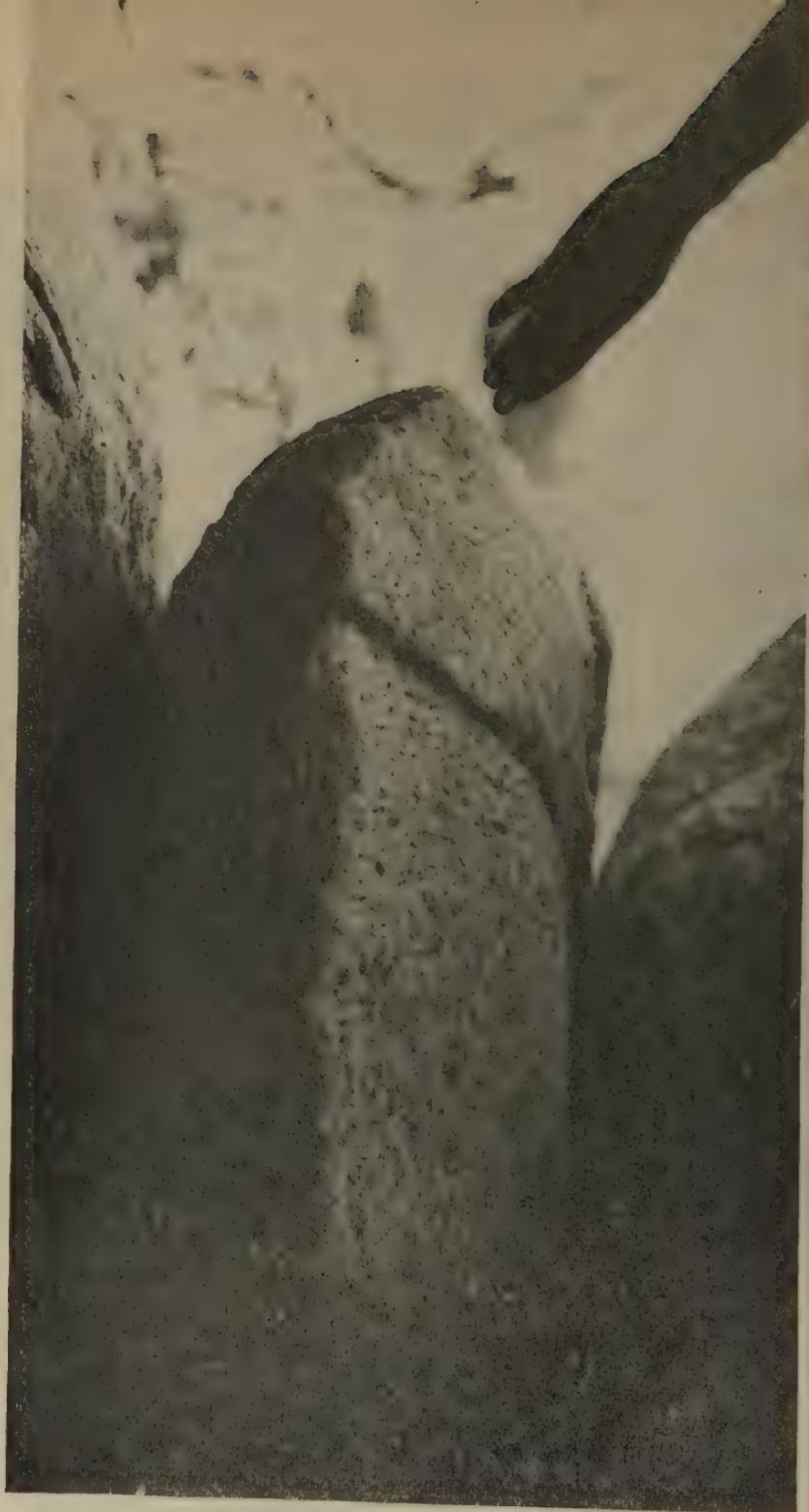
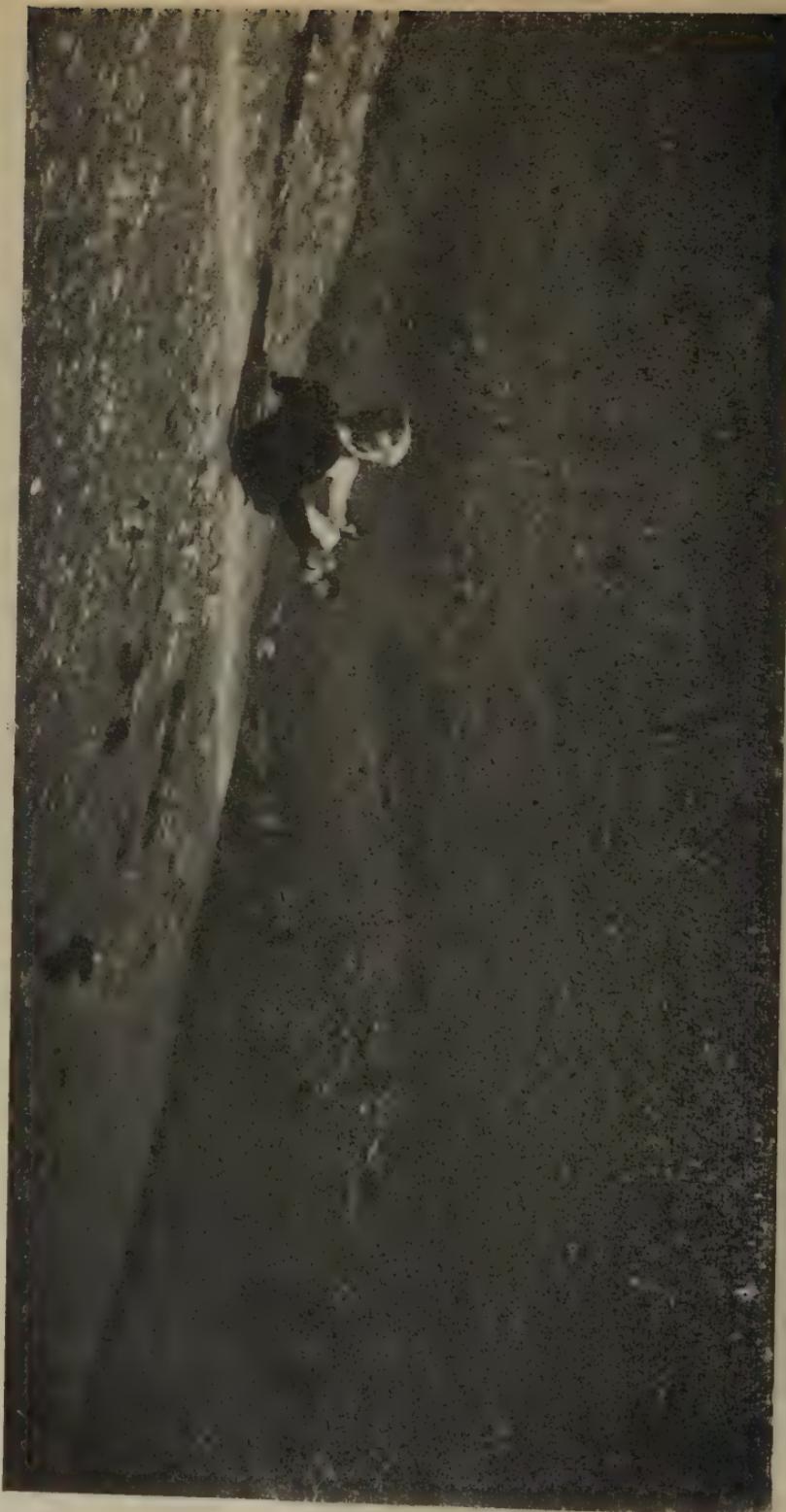




FIG. 16. The rock slide at Garreg Lwyd near Pembrey in South Wales, where the children of the town meet every Good Friday for games

FIG. 17. View of the bottom of the rock slide at Garreg Lwyd, showing the mound of accumulated rock sledges which have broken into useless fragments, a feature characteristic of the African rock slides



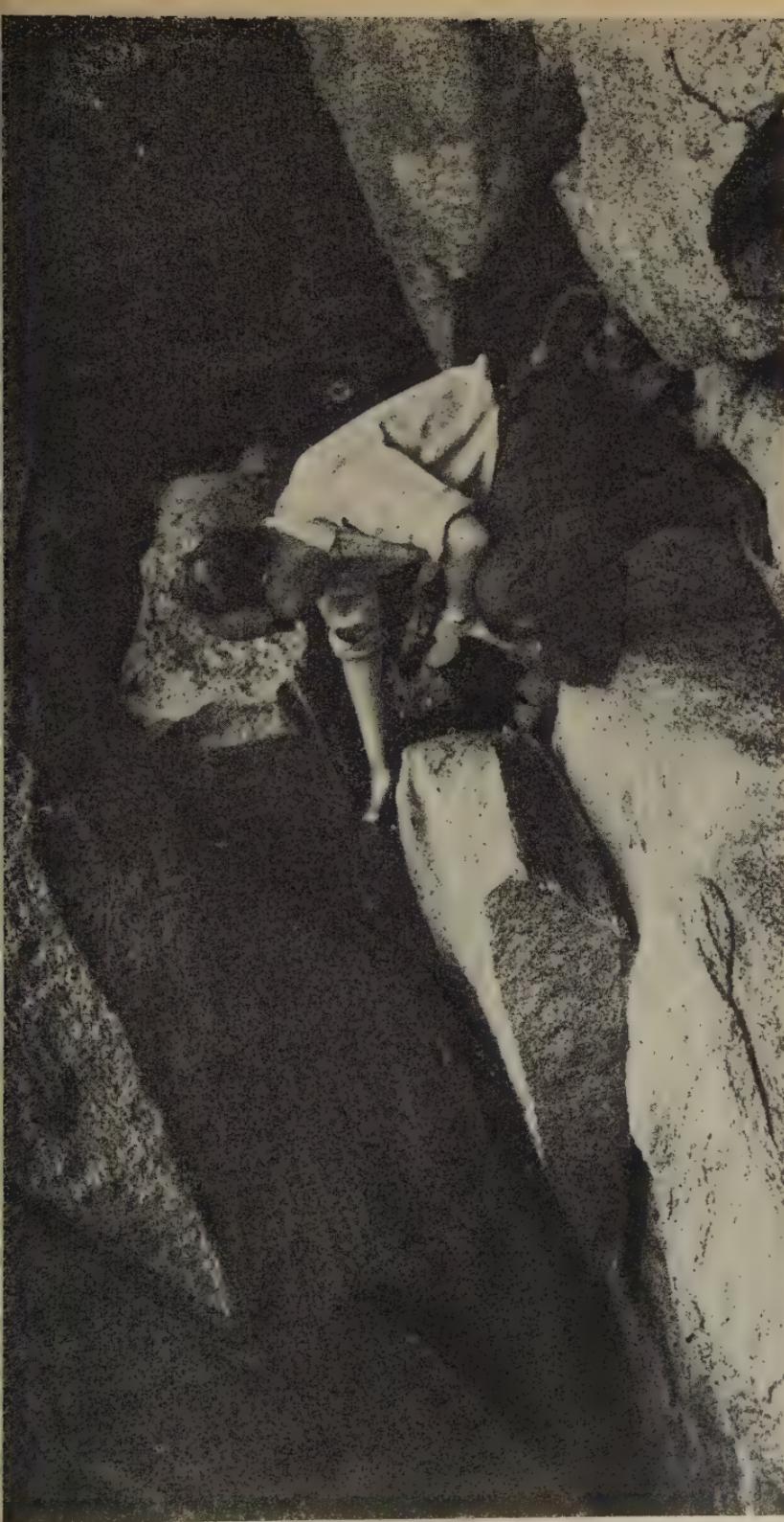


FIG. 18. Rock gong under an overhanging rock close to the main rock shelter in Old Oyo. The large flake of granite, which is lying where it fell after spalling off the huge rock above, has a ringing tone delicate enough to be clearly audible when struck with the palm of the hand. It has only a moderate amount of wear, though there are many other well-worn specimens

he observed several long grooves on the sloping face of the rock which he now thinks were probably rock slides, though at the time he noticed that baboons were disporting themselves on them and he assumed that there was some purely natural explanation for them. This is of considerable interest in view of the evidence at Birnin Kudu linking the rock slides and rock gongs with the cave paintings.

In July, 1955, during the Pan-African Congress on Prehistory in the Federation of Rhodesia, I noticed a rock slide which had been well worn, though probably not in recent years. It was situated in the centre of an important group of pecked rock engravings, which are thought to be of Bantu age, at Ayrshire Farm, near Twin Rivers in Northern Rhodesia. A few days later, at Nsalu Cave, I noticed a ringing rock just outside the mouth of the cave which very probably had been used as a rock gong. However, it was exposed to the weather and the two very suggestive depressions (having different bell notes) had been deeply etched by exposure. I have now heard from Mr. Roger Summers that rock gongs have been found in Southern Rhodesia, though no details are yet available.

Dr. K. P. Wachsmann, Director of the Uganda Museum, in a letter dated 2nd October, 1956, has informed me of a new find in Uganda of a typical rock gong, the first to be recognised there. It is surrounded by boulders of rock covered with impressions, each of which is interpreted as part of an elaborate legend, as are the groups of rock at Kufena, Katsina and Shira in Northern Nigeria.

The use of ringing rocks is recorded by Schaeffner (Andre Schaeffner, *Origine des Instruments de Musique*, Payot, 1936) among the Dogon, but is restricted to games played by the children. A similar insistence that these ringing rocks are exclusively childrens' toys is recorded by Jean Rouch and his colleagues (Jean Rouch, Jean Sauvy, Pierre Porty, *Pierres Chantantes des Ayarou* (Cercle de Tillabery, Niger Francais) *Notes Africaines* No. 33, Jan. 1947) in describing what appears to be a multiple rock gong. The statement that the children amuse themselves by striking it and also slide on one of its inclined surfaces seems to imply that there are rock slides at the site.

Madame Germaine Dieterlen has described seeing rocks similar to the Nigerian rock gongs in a cave at Gourao near Mopti and being told emphatically by the local people that they were not, as she suspected they were, ringing rocks (*pierres sonnantes*). Dr. D. Zahan and Mademoiselle Solange de Ganay have each told me of rock gongs in French West Africa, the former describing them in use today in the upper Volta region.

I have also been informed by Dr. Norman Taylor of the World Health Organisation that a ringing rock, known to local tourists as Bell Rock, exists in a large cluster of boulders between five and ten miles South of Kingwilliamstown on the old East London Road. From his description, it seems to be a typical rock gong, though there is no evidence of its use by the local population.

Rock Gongs and Rock Slides in Europe

I was impressed by the way the African rock gongs had escaped serious notice for so long, and also by the wealth of information which could be collected within less than one year. When I went to Europe on leave in May I was prevented from visiting the Eastern Spanish group of painted rock shelters by delays in the delivery of my car and propose to go there during my next leave. I was able to revisit many of the cave sites of Southern France and will refer later to my tentative conclusions. As a result of a letter from Mrs. E. Ettlinger, I was able to go to Brittany and examine some of the ringing rocks known to exist there as antiquarian curiosities.

At Le Guildo there is a group of amphibolite boulders which appear to be outcropping on the edge of the tidal estuary. They give a clear ringing sound when struck but are apparently weathering spherically *in situ* by natural erosion and do not appear to be of very great age. On the other hand they seem to be well known local antiquities (there is even a large hotel there known as the *Hotel des Pierres Sonnantes*) and are regarded in the local folk-lore as the guardians of the entrance to Satan's Treasury (B. Saintyves, *Corpus de Folk-lore Prehistorique*, Vol. III, Paris, Nourry, 1936, p. 422). The devil endowed them with a metallic resonance so that at the first *choc* he would be warned of the approach of an intruder and take the necessary precautions.* It seems possible that there may have been earlier rock gongs at this site which have settled into the estuarine mud and disappeared, and that the present ones have eroded out of the bank comparatively recently and bear the scars only of tourists' hammering.

By far the most interesting rock gong in Brittany is in the cave-shrine of St. Gildas, where the sixth-century Celtic missionary Saint from South Wales spent many years living as a hermit and died in 570 A.D. (*Guides Bleus, Bretagne*, Hatchette, 1948, p. 331). The cave is situated at the foot of a cliff at Castennec near the lovely valley of St. Nicodeme, a few kilometres South-West of Pontivy. In shape, the rock gong of St. Gildas very much resembles one of those close to Dutsen Zango, at Birnin Kudu (illustrated in Fig. 15). It has been mounted on a masonry pedestal about two feet high in recent years, but has been set upside-down, probably through ignorance of its original method of use. A fist-size quartz pebble is resting on the surface for visitors to strike with and there are two small areas which are slightly bruised. It measures approximately 2 ft. 6 ins. by 2 ft. 6 ins. by 8 ins. thick, and for the purposes of this description it will be assumed to be the correct way up.

It has a crisp metallic bell-note and could well have been used by St. Gildas, as local legends state, to summon his flock to Mass in the

* This belief in the power of the rock gong to summon the attention of supernatural powers can perhaps be paralleled at Kusarha near Gwoza in the Northern Cameroons.

cave chapel (*Guides Bleus*, op. cit. and Saintyves, P., op. cit., who quotes Abgrall, Abbe J. M.. *Les Pierres Sonnantes de St. Gildas et de St. Bieuzy*, B.S.A.F. (1895), XXII, pp.17-32).

Close investigation of the rock gong revealed that the surface has been deeply worn all round by percussion and is similar in appearance to the Nigerian specimens. A continuous rhythmic tapping has produced relatively smooth and gently-curving surfaces with a matt texture.

Contrasting with this comparatively evenly worn surface there is evidence all round the edge that the gong has been struck heavy blows, which has caused considerable splintering on the perimeter and removed a dozen very large flakes. This would appear to be evidence of either an attempt to destroy the rock gong or of efforts to extract the maximum amount of noise from it, which would be consistent with the legend of St. Gildas. In either case, I believe it probable that a heavy metal sledge-hammer was used, since the rock gong is exceptionally hard, and resistant to damage. The quartz pebble is slightly damaged every time the rock gong is struck, and it in turn makes no impression at all on the rock gong.

The internal evidence on the rock gong therefore seems to suggest that the pious St. Gildas absorbed a popular feature of the old pagan religion and adapted it to the use of the Christian Church. His contemporary, St. Bieuzy, appears to have done the same, though his rock gong is much less used and of much inferior tone. It now stands in the Church which bears his name, not more than two miles from the cave of St. Gildas.

The derivation of these two rock gongs from an earlier pre-Christian culture, possibly even from the megalithic complex itself, is quite conceivable for the following reasons.

The rock gongs are said to be made of a foreign rock, which has not yet been identified and whose provenance is not known.

On the Ile St. Gildas, off the North coast of Brittany, is a ruined dolmen which is known as the bed of St. Gildas.

A very cursory examination of some of the megalithic monuments of Morbihan, including the lines of standing stones at Carnac and the gigantic monolith of Locmariaquer, revealed that a considerable proportion of the stones, including some of the horizontal slabs, have a ringing note and a few have abrasions which are quite consistent with hammering. At Locmariaquer, an old peasant in a neighbouring field left his work to come over and tell us to put our ears to one end of the gigantic base fragment (the monolith was shattered by lightning in the eighteenth century). He walked round to the other side and rapped on the huge mass of rock with a stone and a clear bell note came through. This unsolicited gesture may indicate a folk memory of some function of the monolith connected with its physical properties. In Nigeria, for example, rocks are literally described as being alive or dead according to whether or not they have a "voice".

There is ample evidence in Brittany of the survival (at least until the nineteenth century) of pagan rites and beliefs connected with the megalithic monuments which abound in that part of France (Sebillot, *op. cit.*). There are no less than five places cited by Sebillot where there are rock slides, on which the unmarried girls would slide, usually *a cul nu*, in order to ensure their early marriage.

For example, in the Commune of Montault there is a rock slide called *La Roche Ecriante*. It is a huge mass of polished rock which lies inclined towards the South-West at an angle of 45 or 50 degrees. It has three main sliding grooves where through the centuries, innumerable people have slid down. If a girl dreamed of getting married she would go furtively to the summit of the rock, squat down and allow herself to be carried away. She would abandon herself completely and slide rapidly to the bottom. She would then place on the rock a small fragment of cloth or ribbon as an offering and creep away with heart content but fearing to be seen. For the rock alone must know the secret of her heart, and a year will not pass by without the parish candles being lighted for her marriage.¹

Here, surely, is the survival of a fertility rite closely parallel to that found last year at Dutsen Murufu in Birnin Kudu, in each case improperly understood but clung to tenaciously by conservative womanhood contrary to the tenets of their religions, the one Christian, the other Moslem.

... And still so much remains of that grey cult
That, even now of nights, do women steal
To the sole menhir standing, and insult
The antagonistic Church spire by appeal
To power discrowned in vain...

BROWNING, *The Two Poets of Croisic*

During the discussion following a paper read by me to the Royal Anthropological Institute I was informed by Professor Mary Williams of the existence of a rock slide in South Wales similar to those described by me in Nigeria, where an annual children's festival is held every Good Friday. I was also indebted to Mrs. Ettlinger for drawing my attention to a legend of ringing rocks close to a sacred well at Ffynnon Fair near Maenlochog (F. Jones, *The Holy Wells of Wales*, 1954, p. 46). She also told me of a Cromlech in Guernsey known as *La Roche qui sonne* of which I have no further details.

I visited the rock slide (*Fig. 16*) at Garreg Lwyd near Pembrey in Pembrokeshire, and found that it does resemble the African ones, including the existence of a considerable mound of broken rock sledges at the foot of the slide (*Fig. 17*), which in itself rules out the

1. While this paper was in the press I received a letter from Miss Margaret Bennet-Clark of the Department of Ethnography at the British Museum, informing me of a rock slide which exists in Athens. She was informed that women desirous of children would slide *à cul nu* down a steep rock slope on the Acropolis just below the Church of Hagia Maria.

possibility that it is a recent innovation. The children indulge in the fun of the helter-skelter and then congregate at the top of the promontory (many of which are traditional places of pilgrimage) and drink ginger pop, which has in recent years replaced the orthodox honey-water. In view of the evidence from Brittany, there seems little doubt that the Pembrey festivities are also a survival of a pre-Christian Spring festival.

I was interested to discover that Maenclochog literally means "ringing rock", but was disappointed to find on arrival that the two rock gongs were no longer in existence. I was indebted to the local antiquarian, Mr. Titus Lewis, for the information that they were destroyed towards the end of the eighteenth century for use as road metal, to the great disappointment of the local inhabitants at the time, as has happened in Bokkos and Katsina, and no doubt elsewhere, in twentieth-century Nigeria. Mr. Lewis gave me the following extract from Fenton's *Tour through Pembrokeshire*, 1810, pp. 348-349:

"Manclochog obtained its name—the Welsh for ringing stone—from two large stones that lay near the roadside, about a bow-shot from the Church to the South-West, possessing that property, now broken and removed, but perfect and held in great veneration in Edward Llhyd's time, who accompanies his short note with rude, though I daresay correct, drawings of them."

Maenclochog is at the southern end of the Prescelly Mountains, which are covered with megalithic monuments. The famous Blue Stones of Stonehenge are known to have been quarried at the Northern end of the Prescellies and transported with prodigious labour, partly by land and partly by water, to the site in Wiltshire where they now stand.

In a brief reconnaissance of the outcrops at the Northern extremity of the Prescellies I found many ringing rocks, some with an almost startling bell note. They are all exposed to the weather and are in many places covered with moss, whose roots have deeply etched and pitted the surface of the rock. There is one specimen, in particular, which appears to have been used as a rock gong, for it has a depression which could have been caused by hammering over a very long period. But we have been robbed of conclusive evidence by its exposure to the weather. I am convinced, however, that satisfactory evidence of rock gongs will eventually be found in some of the caves which abound in these hills. It is probable that the Prescellies owe their intense sanctity in part at least to the presence of rocks which are "alive" and have a voice.

Stone Music in Asia and America

An account of the rock gongs of Africa and Europe can hardly be complete without a passing reference to the far more sophisticated

stone chimes and lithophones of the Orient and the New World, if only to draw attention to the possibility that rock gongs may yet be found there as well.

Andre Schaeffner (*Origine des Instruments de Musique*, Paris, Payot, 1936) and Curt Sachs (*History of Musical Instruments*, New York, 1940)¹ describe the extraordinary subtlety of music struck from suspended stone plates which now survives only in Confucian temples, though in antiquity it played an all-important part in everyday life. Suspended sonorous stones also occur in Abyssinia and in many parts of the New World, and go back to a remote antiquity (cf. Schaeffner, *Le Lithophone de Ndut Lieng Krak (Vietnam) Revue de Musicologie*, July, 1951). I am indebted to Professor Paul Fejos for the information that multiple rock slides exist in Peru in close proximity to a large number of carved stones and boulders which have not yet been studied.

There seems to be a general agreement among musicologists that stone instruments may have been among man's earliest methods of accompanying the human voice. To those who have heard a primitive blacksmith beating out a rhythm on his stone anvil, it must seem tempting to speculate how the blacksmith's predecessor, the maker of stone implements, could have expressed himself by beating out a rhythm as he struck the stone which rang with a bell-note at every stroke.

With the apparent association of cave paintings, rock music and initiation rites fresh in my mind, I was struck on my first visit to the recently-discovered painted cave at Cougnac in the Dordogne by the astonishing variety of musical notes which could be produced by tapping the stalactites with a pebble. Here was a wonderful, almost a terrifying, setting for initiation rites. Within ten feet of one of the finest of the painted friezes there were lying fragments of stalactites broken in a remote antiquity, as is proved by new growths of calcareous deposits on top of them.

Later, at Font de Gaume, I crawled into a small chamber, adjacent to one of the main galleries, where tourists in the past would go to strike off small souvenirs of their visit to the cavern. In earlier times, the local peasants are said to have collected such fragments for use as medicine. In these conditions it is hardly possible to seek for evidence that the stalactites were ever struck to produce musical notes. But it may be that evidence of delicate percussion may one day be found where the calcareous deposition had ceased before the caves were penetrated by primitive man. Here, surely, is an opportunity for prehistory, folk-lore and ethnography to combine in making a significant contribution to the history of human behaviour.

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1. Cf. also Wallaschek, *Primitive Music*, London, 1893.

THE PROBLEM OF TRADITIONAL HISTORY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO YORUBA TRADITIONS

by

S. O. BIOBAKU

THE HISTORIAN of a non-literate people cannot afford to ignore the traditional accounts of the people's past. He must delve into traditional history, which is essentially *remembered* history, handed down from one generation to another. The technique of African traditional history is constantly to keep alive the memory of the past; to preserve the past consciously in the present. It is a truism to say that all peoples *live* their history; but those who do not write it down live it more consciously than those who do.

In this paper the major elements of Yoruba traditional history will be briefly sketched. Its chief characteristic is that it is *oral* and *recitative*. Yoruba Obas retain professional oral historians, the palace drummers and ballad singers—the Arokin and the Onirara—who chant praise-poems and recite dynastic lists with consummate skill. They are usually carefully trained and their office is nearly always hereditary. The invocation of history is confined neither to royalty nor to great occasions. The humble folk also invoke the history of the lineage of the tribe in everyday life: when a man acquires himself well he is praised as a worthy son of a great ancestor; in a moment of failure a man is adjudged to be unworthy of his forebears. In innumerable land and succession disputes, traditional history is needed to make good one's claim or refute that of another.

Traditional history relies mainly upon the retentive memory, which is sharpened by its constant exercise. Retentive memory is, however, stimulated in other ways. Often, the Yoruba compress events and circumstances into significant forms which are constantly used. There is the well-known device of place names which needs no illustration. There are epigrams such as this: "Reflect upon Gaha's death and mend your ways," which put in a nutshell the episode of the ghastly end of a usurping Bashorun of Oyo as well as serve as a warning to all aspiring over-mighty subjects. The Yoruba weave into their *oriki* or praise-poems selected episodes from the lives of a person and his ancestors and thus provide fond parents or flattering admirers with ready-made appellations to be used as needed. Sometimes the history of a town gives a collective *oriki* to its inhabitants. One example will suffice. From his *oriki* we know that Ogudipe Alatishe, a renowned Egba warrior, was a blacksmith, great at his trade and superhuman in battle: *Ogudipe Alatishe a ta yo ori fikifiki a r'apa s'owu, Yemaja l'ogun*. In *fikifiki*, there is the echo of the bellows and the whole *oriki* epitomises his strength and prowess.

Then myths and legends form an important category of mnemonics in traditional history. The human mind is prone to romanticising; it produces myths and legends in order to preserve ancient historical experiences or elucidate complicated abstract notions. As the past receded the hero became a god and memories of ancient migrations became identified with speculations about the tantalising subject of creation. Examples of creation myths and legends are found all over West Africa—indeed all over the world. The Yoruba myth of Ife as the centre of creation and the legend of Moremi, in my view, provide the historian with important clues as to the riddle of the Near Eastern origin of the Yoruba by revealing their early acquaintance with Biblical stories.

Another element of traditional history is the re-enactment of historical events. The Yoruba indigenous religion, a complicated and variegated polytheism, readily provides an example. The Woro ceremony on the first day of the annual Egungun festival is a procession of masquerades re-enacting the arrival of the leaders of the Yoruba migrations which gave home and hearth to the various communities: the shrine at which the Egungun now forgather annually was invariably the spot around which the Fathers encamped outside the gate in the olden days. Thus in the mystery of ancestor worship, the living community is drawn into communion with the dead; the inheritors with the owners of the land, the source of food, of wealth and well-being, of disputes and of war. Past events of great significance are also re-enacted during the course of contemporary events such as the installation of a new Oba. In Ketu, now a town in French Dahomey, a new Alaketu ritually experiences during the installation ceremony all the vicissitudes through which the founder-Alaketu passed on his way from Ife to Ketu. On the day an Alaketu dies all the Yoruba in Ketu extinguish their fires and later rekindle them from a torch which is lit at a cave from which the Yoruba immigrants had borrowed fire on arrival from their Fon hosts (whom they subsequently subjugated). A still more important example is provided by the ceremony during the installation of an Oni of Ife whereby the Obajio affirms his age-old allegiance to the Oni in return for the latter's protection at a place where, according to tradition, Oduduwa entered Ile-Ife. Thus the fact of a historical event is carefully preserved, even though in popular tradition the fact has been completely submerged in the idealisation of Ife as the centre of all creation. It is clear from the examples of re-enactment that the Yoruba indigenous religion and the chieftainship both subserve to the historical tradition; the religion by its emphasis on ancestor worship, and the chieftainship by the fact that it is the latest edition of the pattern of past leadership. It only remains to add that Yoruba art, functional in the main, provides visual aid to the oral historian in the Benin bronze or Ife terra-cotta heads. (The contribution of art forms to traditional history is, of course, the subject of another paper at this Congress).

The problem of traditional history is manifold. Straightaway, there is the difficulty of obtaining evidence by one who wishes to fashion history out of traditional accounts. As these accounts depend upon memories and Memory, being imperfect, often ignores unpleasant facts when it makes its inevitable selection of events, the historian must check the memory of one man against that of another. He must collect his oral evidence from all sides to a dispute, if he is not to be deceived. Then he must approach his witnesses in the best way to ensure that they tell him the truth as they know it. If he gathers the notables together he may only receive embroidered accounts of old campaigns. Nor is an assembly of young any more helpful; they often see the past in terms of present grievances against their neighbours and so irredentism and other lost causes may pervade their accounts. The best course for the historian is to find out the knowledgeable persons in the area of his subject and interview them in an informal atmosphere. With a few guiding questions the witness may give valuable evidence and if one is lucky he may burst into an illuminating topical song of the past.

Indeed, the task of collecting oral evidence is an urgent one, for the old and well-informed are passing away with the years and the necessities of the modern life in the Yoruba country as elsewhere are destroying the fabric of the communal life which in its every aspect subserves to the historical tradition. Indigenous religion hardly finds devotees among the educated young; very few new chiefs comprehend the historical meaning of installation ceremonies, and many a young wife knows nothing of the *oriki*'s which every bride revelled in reciting a decade or two ago. The answer is to record oral evidence and that quickly before it is lost for ever.

The use of oral evidence, by its very nature, is beset with pitfalls. Much of it is cast in the heroic mould: gods and goddesses, giant and goblins, often stalk traditional accounts and no historian would swallow them all, hook, line, and sinker. He must divest oral evidence from its overlay of romanticising and supernatural agencies. Oral evidence is apt to be superficial only, to stress the simple immediate cause of dire event and be silent as to the deeper, remote causes. An example is the well-known Owu War (1821—1827) in the Yoruba country, which tradition asserts was started by a market affray over the sale of alligator pepper at Apomu Market, whereas the war was the result of the direct impact of the transatlantic slave trade upon the Yoruba country and the introduction of gunpowder by the Ijebu on the one hand, and, on the other, of the disruptive influence of the Fulani incursion from the North. Moreover, oral evidence is usually helpless in the important problem of dating its events. Its 'long ago' must be translated into the appropriate calendar year and it is fortunate that dynastic lists, based upon generations, can be used to calculate some dates. The method is well known and it merely consists of working backwards from a known date and allowing say twenty-five and thirty years per

generation of rulers, and while it may not yield exact dates it does give satisfactory approximations. The important point is that oral evidence can produce fairly reliable dynastic lists and there are many good ones already extant among the Yoruba.

It is a criticism of traditional history that it deals mainly with only the leaders, the elite of the tribe. Whilst this is true, the point is sometimes unduly emphasised; for among the Yoruba, as in other societies not stratified into classes, the kinship of the illustrious was usually wide and many a humble folk could legitimately lay claim to the same ancestors as the ruling Houses. Then, migrations often succeeded one another into the same town or centre but each usually managed to leave its evidence behind among the hierarchy of chieftaincies. A historian of the Yoruba, working on Yoruba traditions, must bear these points in mind.

The main problem of traditional history for the trained historian is that of how much weight he should attach to traditional material. In my view, the historian must "not to the fascination" of hallowed tradition "surrender judgment hoodwink'd." He must admit the validity of oral evidence without being gullible. Moreover, it is his responsibility as a historian to fashion 'evidence' from the traditional sources, and in doing this he must analyse his oral material no less rigorously than he would analyse written material. He must submit his oral evidence to the searchlight of historical criticism. He must bring to bear upon his traditional account his own wider knowledge of History and after judicious analysis reject improbable events. He needs, however, to supplement his own equipment, which by itself is not enough for the task. The resources of the anthropologist, the philologist and the archaeologist must be brought to bear as well, if traditional history is to be properly assessed. For the only worthwhile approach is in the spirit of the modern conception of History, which the late Professor R. G. Collingwood has described as "a study at once critical and constructive, whose field is the human past in its entirety, and whose method is the construction of the past from documents, written and unwritten, critically analysed and interpreted . . .".

The historian of the Yoruba, then, must collect traditional accounts, sift and analyse them and check the result against the available written evidence and in the light of the relevant work of practitioners in the allied disciplines of anthropology, philology and archaeology. The result will be an authentic history. But will it be history as the people themselves conceive their history to be? And among the Yoruba there are already several written accounts, uncritical and legendary, that are called histories. These "patriotic records" are valuable as source books for the trained historians but they are no more histories than that. Nor is this view in any way derogatory to the work of the local historians who are pioneers in a great cause. It is only that while African history must be seen through African eyes it must be the end-product of objective and analytical

study. Traditional accounts by themselves cannot therefore rank as authentic histories but they form the only true basis upon which we can reconstruct the African past. In the words of Professor Blake: "We must study the history of Africa through African eyes and for its own sake," we can do this only by a proper appraisal of traditional history.

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THE EARLY HISTORY OF IJEBU

by

T. O. OGUNKOYA

THE EARLY HISTORY of the Ijebu people is both obscure and uncertain. It is obscure in that until barely two hundred years ago nothing was written of our history. Even now we have to rely on traditions handed down from one generation to another. This way of recording history, as we all realise, is not entirely reliable. Memory may fail: political exigencies may force on the historian the necessity for hiding the truth or remoulding the whole story. All these factors must be carefully weighed together when reading through the early history of our people. It is also uncertain. The history of other countries, say England or America, can be checked by reference to events happening simultaneously in other places, a process greatly facilitated by the existence of written records. As our history is largely unwritten it is not possible to compare our records with those of other countries in this way. The king's bards of ancient times, the royal historians, are no more. The men who profess to know anything of our history are hampered by the political happenings of our day.

It is generally believed that the province now called Ijebu was at one time a desolate, uninhabited forest waste and that it was populated by three waves of migration from the East. Some have claimed that the East here referred to was Wadai; others would go so far as to maintain that it was Mecca. The account given by Sultan Bello of Sokoto is well known. It was largely employed by Captain Clapperton in his *Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa, 1822-1824*. Sultan Bello was here quoted as saying, "The inhabitants of this province (Yarba), it is supposed, originated from the remnant of the children of Canaan who were of the tribe of Nimrod. The cause of their establishment in the West of Africa was, as it is stated, in consequence of their being driven by Yarrooba, son of Kahtan, out of Arabia to the West coast between Egypt and Abyssinia. From that spot they advanced into the interior of Africa until they reached Yarba where they fixed their residence."

We cannot dismiss this story out of hand, for the Ijebu people, like the other Yoruba people, trace their origin to the East. The Ijebu people, however, have not, so far as we can ascertain, claimed Nimrod or any of these mythical persons as their ancestor. However this may be, the Ijebu people claimed that their ancestors came from Ife. Ife appears to have been the first dwelling place settled by the migrants from the East. It was from thence that some of the new settlers set out again to discover and master new lands. Thus our history, like that of the Yoruba people, of which we form a part, begins with Ife, often described as "the cradle of the Yoruba race."

The Founding of Ijebu-Ode and the Origin of its Name

Nobody knows the date of the first migration to Ijebu or the course that it took. Tradition states that it was led by a man named Olu-Iwa accompanied by two warrior companions, Ajebu and Olode. Olu-Iwa settled at Iwade, for Ijebu-Ode itself did not, as yet, exist. Ajebu was instructed to mark out with fire the boundary of the new land. He went westward to the lagoon and marked out the boundaries to the North, South and East as well. To Olode was given the task of marking out and planning the future city, a task which took him more than three years. So well did Ajebu and Olode do their work that the new town was named after them Ajebu-Olode, now corrupted and called Ijebu-Ode. There seems to be ample evidence in favour of this tradition. In Ijebu-Ode today there stands in a prominent place in Olode Street a tomb dedicated to him and bearing the inscription "The resting place of Olode." In Imepe Street there can be seen a tomb dedicated to the memory of Ajebu. It may be taken for granted that these two men are historical figures whose names have been perpetuated in the name of the city.

Though Ijebu tradition supports the view that the name Ijebu-Ode means the town or settlement founded by Ajebu and Olode, there is another theory of the origin of the name. Portuguese maps of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries showed *cuidade de Jabu* or "the city of Ijebu." Now it is argued that the Ijebu, in common with people of similar ancestry, used the word *Ode* as a generic name for a town. So the Itschekri people had *Ode Itschekri* (Warri). The Ondo had *Ode Ondo* and the Ilaje *Ode Ilaje*. In Wadai there was an *Ode Ijebu*, suggesting the transference of the name of the ancient home to the new. In support of this view it is to be noted that until very recently all the village people in the province referred to the city simply as *Ode*. As they themselves are Ijebus they merely point to their capital town without associating their name with it.

The Coming of Arisu

The second wave of migration to Ijebu was that led by Arisu, nicknamed Oba Ijası. Little or nothing is known about this leader. He was said to have come from Ife, like his predecessor. No-one knows why he left Ife or when he arrived in his new home. He settled in that part of Ijebu-Ode called Ijası. As the town had already been laid out by Olode he merely entered on the work of his predecessor.

The Migration of Ogborogan

The third and final migration to Ijebu was that led by Ogborogan, variously named Obanta and Awujale. Legend has it that Olu-Iwa, founder of Ijebu, had only one daughter named Gborowo. She was married to Oduduwa, spiritual head of all the Yoruba people, before Olu-Iwa left Ife for Ijebu. Olu-Iwa wished his grandson Ogborogan, son of Oduduwa, to succeed him on his death. When

Ogborogan grew and became a man he decided to go in search of the patrimony left him by his maternal grandfather. His journey from Ife took him first to the East via Imesi, then South through the modern Ondo Province, then westwards almost along the present main road from Ondo to Ijebu-Ode. He set out from Ife with a large crowd of followers, including his mother, Gborowo. His journey to Ijebu-Ode was a long and arduous one. It must have taken many months, if not years. According to Ijebu historians Ogborogan was aided by the advice of some competent *Ifa* priests who showed him the path he was to follow. He was further aided by the power of charms which they carried. Shortly before his death Oduduwa had summoned his sixteen children and given them gifts. To each of them he gave a crown; to Ogborogan in particular he gave an orb and three small gourds, *Ado*, containing charms. The orb had the virtue of producing good character in whoever possessed it. The charms, if properly used, would prosper the way of the bearer. It was so armed that Ogborogan set out on his great adventure. The *Ifa* priests consulted the oracle at every stage of the journey and with the help of the charms in the gourds predicted the fortune of their chief.

The Origin of the Odi

Until his arrival at Imesi, Ogborogan had travelled without a bodyguard. During his sojourn with the Oloja of Imesi, however, the latter gave him some men to protect his person. This was the origin of the *Odi*, a body of men who were to be of great importance in the history of Ijebu.

The Origin of the Title "Awujale"

When Ogborogan reached Igbo the chief of the village Olu-Igbo refused them passage. The issue was decided by a wrestling match between the two leaders. Ogborogan had on previous occasions given evidence of his prowess in this type of fighting. Olu-Igbo was ignominiously defeated and the passage gained. For his success in this encounter Ogborogan was given the nickname *Amujaile* (someone who understands the art of wrestling on land). This, it is believed, is the origin of the title Awujale used by the reigning paramount chief in Ijebu land. It may be worth while here to examine another tradition of the origin of the title Awujale. Johnson in his *History of the Yoruba* describes an incident in which two towns called Owu Ipole and Iseyin Ondo were involved—a boundary dispute between these neighbouring clans. The Olowu of Owu and the Oni of Ife were unable to settle the dispute. An appeal was lodged with the Alafin of Oyo, who despatched a notable Ilari and a large number of followers to adjudicate in the matter. According to Johnson, this Ilari came and settled between the contending parties. He was named *Agbejaile* (an arbiter in a land dispute). This was how the Ijebu got their title Awujale. This may sound plausible but from the traditions and historical evidence at our disposal there

is nothing to suggest that Johnson's thesis has any bearing on the origin of the title. The Ijebu people believe that the title of their king came from his contest with the Olu-Igbo at Igbo. After the defeat of the lord of Igbo his followers agreed to join their caravan on its journey. Among them were the future Alara, the Alalisha, the Elepe, the Alado and the Onipara. Aka, the wife of Olu-Igbo, though pregnant, joined the procession also.

The Cult of Obinrin Ojowu

The next place of importance on their journey was Ibu. Here the migrants appear to have spent an unusually long time. They learnt the customs of the people and copied many of their ways. Ibu is supposed to have been the home of the cult of *Obinrin Ojowu* (the envious woman). Before they left Ibu the followers of Ogborogan carried away with them the stone image of Obinrin Ojowu. At the end of their long journey they deposited the image in a hut at Odo Esa and marked the site by planting a young iroko tree near it. The cult of Obinrin Ojowu has become a national one for the Ijebu, celebrated in February every year. The priest of this cult, the Olowa, is a leading member in the hierarchy of the Awujale priests.

The Death of Gborowo

In the course of the journey a tragic incident befell them at the Oshun River. Gborowo, mother of Ogborogan, died immediately after crossing, worn out by her infirmities and the difficulties encountered on the way. Ogborogan buried her on the bank of the river and vowed to perform ritual sacrifice in her honour every year. From this time until the British occupation in 1892, a yearly human sacrifice was made on the river in her honour. Since then human sacrifice has been forbidden and a fat cow has been sacrificed every year until the present day.

Ogborogan's Arrival at Ijebu

The journey of Ogborogan and his followers now became relatively easy. They passed through Imusin, Ilese and the Owa stream. They entered Ijebu-Ode through Odo Esa, where the general hospital now stands. We are on firmer ground when we relate the story of this last stretch of the journey, for whenever a new Awujale is to be installed he has to go through the latter part of the journey in his brief, but rigorous, sojourn outside Ijebu-Ode, called *Odo*. No Awujale can be said to have carried out his full traditional regal functions, or indeed be entitled to be called an Awujale, if he has not gone through the ceremonies outside Ijebu-Ode and the journey back into it.

Our histories do not tell us how long had elapsed between the death of Olu-Iwa and the arrival of Ogborogan. Arisu, the leader of the second wave of migration, had arrived in Ijebu-Ode while Olu-Iwa was yet alive. On the death of Olu-Iwa, Arisu's son Oshin had ruled in his place as regent. On his long journey Ogborogan

had collected a vast crowd of followers; some had been attracted by the fame of a son of Oduduwa and descendant of Olu-Iwa, others followed through a love of adventure and others were fugitives from justice. When he arrived at the gates the noise of the crowd at his back soon spread the rumour that a great man, accompanied by a large following, had reached the town. Oshin, the regent, was startled and amazed at the news. The Ife oracle had long predicted that a grandson of Olu-Iwa would come to Ijebu-Ode to rule his grandsire's kingdom. The stately and striking figure of Ogborogan marked him out from his companions. It was no wonder then that the vulgar people acclaimed the stranger an Oba.

The Origin of the Title "Obanta"

Hearing the acclamations of the people, the Apebi sought to discover the cause. Ogborogan was now outside the Apebi's house and the people shouted that the king he was looking for was outside—"Oba wa nita," that is "*Obanta*." This is the traditional origin of the title *Obanta*.

Johnson proposed another theory of the origin of the name. He cites the authority of a tradition that the Olowu offered a human being in sacrifice at a cross-roads. The victim was maltreated and left for dead; revived by the evening dew, he regained consciousness and crawled into the nearby forest. From this man, *Ebo-Ni-Ita*, sacrifice on the highway, so Johnson asserts, rose the leader of the Ijebu race. The followers of this man, he maintains, altered his name to *Oba-Ni-Ta*, a king on the highway. It is sufficient to say that Ijebu history and oral traditions give no support to this theory of the origin of the title *Obanta*.

The Settlement of the Province and the Appointment of Chiefs

On his entry into the town Ogborogan met Oshin, the regent. Oshin spoke with him at length of the wonderful work of Olu-Iwa and his companions Ajebu and Olode. Graciously he handed over to Obanta the regalia and the royal house. So the Awujale settled down in his new domain. Oshin left the palace and went to live in that quarter of Ijebu-Ode called until today Ita Osugbo. The whole ward which Oshin's followers came to fill became known as Oke Ijası.

We have already noticed that the Alara, the Elepe, the Alalishan, the Alado and the Onipara had come with Ogborogan from Igbo. They settled in the palace with their leader. By this time Aka, the wife of Olu-Igbo, had been delivered of a male child, the ancestor of all the Akarigbos. She was put up in a house at Ishokun, quite close to the palace.

The peaceful ordering of the territory now inherited by Obanta was carried out as the various groups of immigrants settled down in the region. Having satisfied himself with the orderly government of Ijebu-Ode, the Awujale directed the Alara, the Elepe, the Alalishan,

the Alado, the Onipara, and the Onipakala, one of the original immigrants from Ife, and now called the Ologere, to settle in Ijebu Remo.

There can be no doubt that the Awujale holds sway as overlord over the whole province. Though it was Ajebu who, as a special emissary from Olu-Iwa, demarcated the boundaries of the province, it was the Awujale who conferred honours on the princes by appointing them district chiefs in his kingdom. It was the Awujale, too, who despatched Akarigbo, the son of Olu-Igbo and Aka, when he became a man, to settle at Ofin in Shagamu.

The Waves of Migration

It is hardly credible that there were no settlers in Ijebu before Olu-Iwa and his followers came. Talbot has suggested that the Ijebu "probably represent one of the earliest waves of Yoruba." The date of the earliest arrivals in this region he computed at about 1000 B.C. It may be that, like the later immigrants, such early settlers made Ife their capital, and that after many generations these earliest inhabitants of the Yoruba province degenerated.

Tradition states that there have reigned in Ijebu-Ode from Obanta, the first Awujale, thirty-eight of his successors before the reign of the first Gbelegbuwa, which began in 1760 A.D. If we assign an average reign of twenty years to these Awujale that will take us back to about 1000 A.D. as the date when the first Awujale began his reign. This date coincides with that given by Talbot—600-1000 A.D.—when a wave of immigrants from the East, partly of Hamitic or other brown race blood, introduced another development of culture and provided the ruling families among the Yoruba, as among the Borgu and Nupe. This account seems to tally with that given by Sultan Bello of Sokoto of the origin of the Yoruba.

It must be observed that any change referred to so far has been that of the ruling families; the dumb masses remained at the mercy of the new energetic race that came to the country. No account has been afforded us of the peasants, though, as we have seen, it is possible the land was inhabited long before the arrival of either Olu-Iwa or Arisu. It may be conjectured that many generations must have passed before the country came to settle down. The newcomers who became the masters and rulers of the newly acquired territory must have worked hard before they could carve out for themselves an appreciable portion of land. To give the land the peace and tranquility required for the peasants to till the soil, the traders to go about their business, the tolls to be collected and law to be respected, must have taxed their ability. We should not fall into the error of believing that the immigrants left little mark on the lives of the indigenous inhabitants. It is probable that they breathed new life into what social, political, and economic institutions already existed and introduced such innovations as seemed to them necessary. Just

what changes they made is difficult to tell. The first noticeable thing is that they became the accredited rulers and leaders of the people. The title of the Awujale as an office came from them. On the other hand, some of the hereditary titles of the ancient inhabitants were retained. We may guess that such elaborate institutions as that of the Ilamuren, the Osugbe, the Pampa and the Parakoyi were as ancient as the first settlers. The immigrants found these institutions in existence and, in an attempt perhaps to mollify the people, preserved and strengthened them. The immigrants, we may suppose, did not arrive in such numerical strength as to overwhelm the inhabitants and may well have accommodated themselves to the prevailing conditions once the preliminary squabbles had settled down. The Awujale needed advice in his capacity as head of the state. He had the traditional rulers of the country at hand and would naturally consult them in difficult matters.

Law and custom developed apace. The duties and rights of each group were ascertained and confirmed, and each succeeding generation followed the established custom with little variation until the coming of the Europeans and the introduction of the alphabet. Change of dynasties meant little to the common people. They continued to pay the accustomed taxes, the tolls at the gates and the many imposts levied upon them; the gods were appeased and the rich sacrifices offered. Seasons came and went; planting was done at the usual time, to be followed by the harvest. The common people concerned themselves little with dynastic quarrels and squabbles, the luxury of the great.

The Awujale and his Chiefs

The government of Ijebu as a whole, and Ijebu-Ode in particular, had been conducted in an orderly manner long before the first Awujale had arrived. The new settlers were no innovators; they adopted what they met without introducing radical changes. The position of the Awujale was regarded as sacred. He was revered as a god. Men swore by his names, and sealed their deeds with them. Until about 1500 A. D., that is during the reign of Jadiara, the twentieth Awujale, the terms Olu and Awujale were used interchangeably for the reigning monarch. By the end of this reign, however, the term Olu had been dropped in favour of the more dignified title of Awujale. The former Awujales were referred to as Olu or Awujale until a definite choice was made. The Awujale did not himself sit in Council, adjudicate cases or settle differences between one section of the people and another. He did nothing for himself, though everything was done in his name. The real rulers of the town were the Ilamuren, the Osugbo, the Pampa and the Parakoyi. Because he was never seen outside his palace except on ceremonial occasions once or twice every year, the proverb went round that "Kings were not seen every month."

The new-fangled principle of indirect rule formulated by Lord Lugard and annunciated by successive governors of the country, whereby chiefs became sole native authorities, was a perversion of native law and custom. It was contrary to the customs of the founders of this province at least.

The Ilamuren

The true rulers of Ijebu were the Ilamuren. They made the laws, in consultation with the Osugbo, and they carried out the multifarious duties of government in the name of the Awujale, who was always kept in the background as a figurehead. The Ilamuren chiefs had their court (the *Owa* court) in the Awujale's palace, which met every five days and was a Court of Appeal from the lower courts. Their tribunal consisted of the following tribal chiefs: the Olisa, the Ogbeni Oja, the Egbo, the Otu, the Olowa, the Olowa Oborowo and the Ologben. These were the Ilamuren chiefs. As they united legislative with judicial powers, it was easy for them to interpret justice in their own favour. They were, indeed, very powerful.

The Olisa

The head of the Ilamuren was the chief Olisa. He stood second in rank to the Awujale. Nothing could be accomplished in the state without his acquiescence. When the Ilamuren met it was his place to direct affairs and take the final decision upon every deliberation. The title by which he was known familiarly was *Ogo Erulu* (a chief who shoulders the responsibility of the state). When a decision upon any state affair had been made the Olisa communicated this to the Awujale, whose duty was to signify his assent. There was no question as to who was to take the decision—the Awujale had simply to accede to the proposals of his Ilamuren chiefs. He was, until the British came, a constitutional ruler. The Olisa chieftaincy has always been hereditary in certain families in Ijebu-Ode.

The Ogbeni Oja

This was an ancient title, perhaps as old as the foundation of Ijebu-Ode itself. No-one could aspire to this high office who had not already passed through the offices of Ologben, Olowa and Olotufore in succession. It was never hereditary. Any successful man qualified by wealth or influence who had passed through the necessary stages could be named by the Ilamuren as the Ogbeni Oja. He was a go-between between the Ilamuren, the Osugbo, the Pampa and the Parakoyi. Meetings were held in his house, where grievances about the conduct of state affairs were discussed. He it was who represented these grievances to the Ilamuren.

The Odi

Next in the hierarchy were the Odi. They were the immediate servants of the Awujale and formed his bodyguard. They kept the

record of the ruling houses and chose a new Awujale on the death of the reigning monarch. The people looked to them for guidance because of their unrivalled knowledge of native law and custom. They had their separate court where cases were brought and judgement passed. They had jurisdiction, we may guess, in civil cases alone. If a defendant or complainant in the case felt dissatisfied, he was at liberty to take his case to the Owa, the final Appeal Court of the land. The Odi had various grades and ranks among them. They were the Eketa Odi, the Ekeji Odi, the Ogbeni Odi, the Olowa and the Olotu Odi. An ambitious Odi could become the Ologben from which he might climb grade by grade until he obtained the position of Ogbeni Oja.

The Osugbo

The Osugbo formed the executive arm of the state. It was a secret society and only the initiated could be members. Membership, however, was open to anyone who paid the entrance fee and fulfilled all the obligations pertaining to an elder. He would then be taught the password. The Osugbo was made up almost entirely of older men. It was rarely that a young man was found in their ranks. The Osugbo met for deliberation at their Iledi. They had their own court of law, which was an appeal court. Anyone dissatisfied with a judgement passed in his ward could bring an appeal there. It is doubtful, however, whether they ever had a long calendar of cases because of their terrible association. Appeals from the Osugbo lay to the Owa court. Murderers who had been proved and convicted were handed over to the Osugbo. The Olotu Alase was their chief.

The Pampa

The Pampa was a society of all the young men resident in any town or village in Ijebu. Every village or town had its association of this kind. It was a free association admitting members without any financial obligation. They had their own chiefs chosen from among themselves for distinguished service to the state. They were the Agbon, the Asipa, the Lapoekun, the Jagun and the Kakanfo. In the city of Ijebu-Ode itself there were three Pampa societies. The young men who lived at Iwade had the Agbon as their chief and spokesman. In Iiasi their leader was the Lapoekun and in Porogun the Kakanfo. There were subordinate chiefs under each of the leading Pampa chiefs.

The Pampa Court

The Pampa society had its own court in which the major Pampa chiefs sat. They had jurisdiction over all the markets in the province and sent their representatives to all markets on fixed market days. All cases concerned with buying and selling had to be brought to them as a court of first instance. If the complainant were not satisfied he could appeal to the Osugbo court and from there to the Owa court.

The Parakoyi

The Parakoyi was the militia and was made up of every able-bodied person capable of purchasing and bearing arms. In early days these might be bows and arrows and later the dane gun. No general training was undertaken or even attempted. As soon as it was known that the peace of the country was threatened the Balogun who was at the head of the Parakoyi summoned his lieutenants, the Otun Balogun, the Osi Balogun, the Eketa Balogun and the Ekerin. When these had informed their subordinates and the message had been relayed to all concerned, the whole army under the Balogun would proceed to the scene of action. War was never declared in the modern sense. It was a matter of surprise raids and ambuscade. It was in this way that most of the domestic slaves of ancient times were secured. The Parakoyi was a power to be reckoned with in the land. There are instances in Ijebu history when it held its own country to ransom.

The High Council

With the passing of time something like a council of state seems to have grown up, made up of all the Ilamuren chiefs; the Olotu Odi, the Ogbeni Odi, the Eketa Odi; the Osugbo chiefs; the three Pampa chiefs; and the five Parakoyi chiefs. The functions of this council do not seem to have been well defined. In the absence of any records we can only guess at the scope of their jurisdiction. The counsellors advised the Awujale on major issues of policy. They directed the affairs of state and it is believed no issue of fundamental importance could be settled without their concurrence.

The three important festivals of the year, the Obinrin Ojowu, the Agemo, and the Osun, were their special preserve. They fixed the calendar by declaring when these festivals should take place and informed the Awujale of their decision. During these festivals the council accompanied the Awujale to the Itoro ground, where the performances took place. The Awujale in solemn priestly robes, surrounded by his Oloris and chiefs, displayed his wealth and kingly state. As the Awujale was usually kept in the background his appearance on these occasions aroused the greatest interest. His subjects would throng every available space to catch a view of their ruler.

Other Institutions

It is worth mentioning some other social and political institutions of ancient Ijebu. The Ijebu state possessed a treasury where the tolls and taxes collected were kept. Here the regalia of the Awujale, his gowns, his crown, the state drums and swords, were carefully looked after. There was also a prison yard where offenders were kept pending the determination of their sentences. It is doubtful, however, whether there was any jail for offenders serving sentences.

Domestic slavery featured prominently as one of the institutions upon which the society was founded. Domestic slaves comprised

captives in war, men who pawned themselves or their children, and evil characters. They were often treated as members of the family of their masters. No harsh treatment was allowed. Some of them regained their freedom after they had carried out certain rites or performed some heroic act like the killing of a leopard in a hunting expedition.

The Extent of the Ijebu Kingdom

At the height of its prosperity, between 1760 and 1890 A.D., the Ijebu kingdom was bounded on the North by the modern Ibadan province, on the East by the Ondo province, on the West by the Abeokuta province and on the South by the lagoon. Ijebu was never included in the Yoruba state of Oyo which, when at its greatest height—1700-1870 A.D.,—included the Yoruba provinces of Oyo, Ilorin, Abeokuta and North Ondo. The success of the Ijebu in resisting inclusion in this forest state was probably due to two main reasons, its nearness to the port of Lagos and its commanding position as middle man between the European traders on the coast and the Northern Yoruba. The whole of Ijebu province, which then incorporated Epe, Ejirin and Ikorodu, was homogeneous. The people spoke the same dialect of the Yoruba language. They were an exclusive people, much disliked by their neighbours for this trait. No visitor was allowed to enter the town of Ijebu-Ode. The town had an evil reputation. There was a common saying, *Ijebu-Ode ajeji ko wo; bi ajeji ba wo laro, won a fi sebo lale.* (Ijebu-Ode, a town forbidden to foreigners; if a foreigner entered it in the morning, he was sure to be sacrificed in the evening). Any information regarding the town, even at the time of the first European penetration into what is now Nigeria, was of necessity second-hand, since no foreigner was allowed to enter it.

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RESEARCH NOTES

THE YORUBA HISTORICAL RESEARCH SCHEME

(Submitted by Dr. S. O. Biobaku)

IN ITS PLANS for the development of the Western Region of Nigeria 1955-60 the Regional Government set aside the sum of £40,000 under the head of "Cultural Research" for a scheme of research into the history of the Yoruba people. The scheme is to take up a period of five years. Its object is to produce an authentic history of the Yoruba, covering all sections of the people from the earliest times. It will include in its survey not only the territory actually occupied by the Yoruba people but all areas which are, or have been, under Yoruba influence.

The scheme will investigate the theory of Yoruba migration from the Near East. It is envisaged in this connection that investigations will extend as far as the Sudanese Republic, with a view to tracing possible routes of migration. A study will also be made of the early movements of the people within the territory now known as Nigeria, and of the establishment of the Yoruba kingdoms.

The main problem facing the scheme is, of course, that of reconstructing history from unwritten sources. It is intended to make use of all modern methods of research into the past of non-literate societies. This will involve archaeological work, the analysis of anthropological data and the recording of oral evidence and a careful study of such documents as exist.

A great part of the work will clearly consist of the collection of oral evidence. Important here will be the recording of re-enactment ceremonies, such as the installation of Obas and Chiefs. The equipment of the scheme includes a mobile recording unit for this purpose.

The project is to employ the services both of academically trained experts and of well-known local authorities on the history and culture of the Yoruba. The Western Region Government have appointed the author of this note as Director of the scheme. Besides directing the scheme he will be responsible for the publication of its results. In addition, provision has been made for the appointment of two full-time officers. Of these, Mr. P. Morton-Williams has already taken up his appointment and is engaged in preliminary work. He has visited museums in Great Britain and on the continent of Europe to survey material relevant to the history of the Yoruba. He has worked in the past as an anthropologist at Oyo (under the auspices of the West African Institute of Social and Economic Research) and will continue his work there. The scheme will avail itself also of the services of certain expert consultants. Thus Mr. Willet, an archaeologist from the Manchester museum at present in Nigeria under the auspices of the Antiquities Service, is associated with the scheme and is at present conducting excavations at Old Oyo.

It is intended also to invite an eminent authority on West African antiquities to undertake a study of Yoruba art objects, and submit his findings as material on the cultural aspect of Yoruba history.

At the same time, a number of research associates are being appointed. These, while not being professional historians, are men with considerable knowledge of the history of their localities. In the selection of these associates an attempt is being made to cover all areas included in the scheme.

The scheme hopes to enlist the widest possible support from the general public. It is hoped that people will assist the scheme by calling attention to documents, supplying oral evidence, and giving access to art objects in private possession.

THE BENIN STUDY

(Submitted by H. F. C. Smith)

AS THE scientific study of the history of the interior of West Africa involves problems which do not confront the historical study of regions possessing wealth of written documentary evidence of their past, new techniques of historical research must clearly be applied in this field.

The historian of Africa must call to his aid types of research which have in the past usually pursued their enquiries independently, and of which the results have only rarely been regarded as directly bearing on historical study. Thus anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, the study of art forms, have not usually been regarded as necessary disciplines for the orthodox historian to master. And the best historians, generally speaking, have done little more than read the published work of scholars in these other fields.

A scheme of research now being put into operation at the University College, Ibadan, in connection with the history of Benin, marks a new departure. The principle underlying it is that scholars working on *all* possibly connected lines of research should actually work together in the field, in continual close contact with each other throughout the period of their research.

Benin provides an excellent example of a field in which the combined efforts of the historian, the linguist, the anthropologist, sociologist, art expert and archaeologist can be pooled, sifted and checked.

From medieval times the kingdom of Benin was the dominant power in Southern Nigeria. It extended its conquests from Lagos in the West to Bonny River in the East and northwards to Idah. The universality of claims to Benin origin among the tribes of the Niger Delta and the Western Ibos is evidence, at the least, of the powerful influence which this hereditary monarchy exercised on the imagination of its neighbours. The study of the past of this ancient kingdom would provide the key to the understanding of the history of Southern Nigeria.

Benin was also the only Nigerian state with which a European power, Portugal, maintained diplomatic relations in the fifteenth century. As a result of this contact, a vast literature on Benin history is preserved in the records of travellers and in the state papers of Portugal, Holland, England and France. In the study of this kingdom it is therefore possible to check a good deal of the internal evidence from external sources and vice versa.

Finally, the classical art of Benin is more or less well known in Europe and America, and many examples of it are preserved.

A concerted study of Benin may be expected to produce two categories of results: (a) a reconstruction of the internal history of the kingdom, (b) a basis for a reconstruction of much of the cultural history of a wide area of Southern Nigeria.

To undertake such a concerted study £45,000 has been obtained (by donations from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund, the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Carnegie Trust) by the University College, Ibadan, to be expended over five years under the direction of Professor K. O. Dike. The scheme, to be known as the Benin study, is to be formally launched at Benin on 21st January 1957.

The establishment of the scheme provides for the full time employment of an anthropologist, a historian, and an art expert. In addition, many local authorities on Benin history and culture will be associated with the work. The Benin royal family and nobility have generously offered their cooperation.

As this note goes to press the anthropologist, Dr. R. E. Bradbury, and the historian, Mr. A. F. C. Ryder, are already engaged in preparatory work. A South African archaeologist, Professor Goodwin of the University of Capetown, at present excavating at Benin under the Nigerian Antiquities Service, is also associated with the scheme.

ORAL TRADITION IN THE CULT OF THE ORISHAS AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE HISTORY OF THE YORUBA

(Condensed from a Paper by P. Verger submitted to the first
Conference of the Historical Society of Nigeria)

ORAL TRADITIONS embodied in the cult of the *Orishas* provide an important source of material for the study of Yoruba history.

The *Orishas* are deified ancestors regarded as the founders of certain families. The *Oriki* is a form of salutation in which the illustrious names, emblems and praiseworthy attributes of the *Orisha* are proclaimed, his deeds and exploits recalled. Each *Orisha* has his particular set of *Orikis*.

It might appear that these *Orikis* have little connection with the history of the Yoruba. We should not forget, however, that history

does not consist solely of lists of kings, battles, conquests and great catastrophes. It is made up largely of the daily life of the inhabitants of a country in different epochs. Nothing is more revealing of the attitude to life which shapes the pattern of living at a certain time than proverbs and maxims. They reflect the form of social organisation of the moment.

Certain Orikis contain some reference to historical events and can be given an approximate date. For example, "He goes dancing gbango from Ibadan to Oyo"—(Oshogbo). This Oriki must date from a period later than that during which the men of Oyo settled in Ibadan and took their principal Orisha there. Such Orikis as "He baptises anew the Moslem" or "He pursues the Christian with a loud cry" can be assigned to more recent times.

Such formal phrases are often long preserved in popular diction and throw some light on history. For example, in the temple of Lissa at Abomey the Orikis of the Orisha are still recited in the ancient language of Anago (Yoruba). This tells us something of the origin of the Orisha which the Fon call *Vodun*. The fact that this ancient dialect form of the language occurs again in the Valley of Mono, now separated from Yorubaland by the expansion of the Dako Donu who came from Allada at the beginning of the seventeenth century, gives some indication of the period during which the cult of this Orisha was established.

Then again, certain Orikis relating to particular Orishas are found in identical form in different districts. This would seem to imply that they have spread from a common centre and probably refer to traditions of the Orishas in their place of origin or some secondary centre of diffusion. In temples at Pobe and Adja Were, for example, the name Sho Ipashan is invoked before the recital of the Orikis of Shango. (In temple ritual the annunciation of the Orikis is preceded by a prayer in which the original founders of the cult and mythical persons supposed to belong to the family are invoked). At Ketu Sho Ipashan is regarded as the husband of Odua. Here is a passage from a text preserved by the elders of Ketu:—

"The people of Ketu, of Ishabe, and of Oyo were brought into the world by one father alone. . . The king of Ife brought three children into the world—Oba Ketu, Oba Shabe, Oba Oyo. . . The name of their father is Oba Sho Ipashan; the mother who bore them is called Toludagbaka—we also call her Odua."

So we see the name of Sho Ipashan figures in the traditions of Ketu as well as in the prayers preceding the Orikis of Shango at Pobe and Adja Were. So, too, the Orikis of Ogun, Orisha of blacksmiths, warriors and hunters, are often found in identical form in widely different places. One of them goes as follows:—"Onile kangun-kangun ole orun" ("Lord of the great house in the sky"). This was found by the author at Ara Moko, Lagos, Ketu, Abeokuta, Onida and Abomey, with certain local variations in the pronunciation of the second word. He found the same formula at Bahia in Brazil

amongst descendants of Negroes, taken there as slaves, who had remained faithful to the religion of their ancestors. It is noted also in a book by Lydia Cabrera (*El Monte*, p. 385) on the subject of the Negroes in Cuba.

Other Orikis, again, are peculiar to particular districts and refer to events in local history.

It seems probable that an extended study of the Orikis in conjunction with traditional material derived from other sources would be of great value for research into the history of the Yoruba people. The author has visited West Africa under the auspices of the Institut Francais d'Afrique Noire and collected about 1,700 of these Orikis relating to a dozen Orishas. He hopes to publish the results of this work in the near future.

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